

The Pharmacy of Euripides: Asclepius and the Theater of Dionysus

If this road, before it opens into the grove of the Muses, leads us over by the temple of Asclepius, so is this for acquaintances of Aristotle only further proof that we are moving in the right footsteps. -- Jacob Bernays[1]

Jacob Bernays, the first great proponent of the medical interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis (and the uncle of Sigmund Freud's wife), was closer to a truth about tragedy than he realized, because the Muses indeed are quite close to the temple of Asclepius. For if Aristotle ever did visit the Theater of Dionysus in Athens to witness dramatic performances, an activity he subordinated to reading, a few steps, even a brief glance over his shoulder, would have taken him into the Athenian City Asklepieion.

In the following investigate the interplay the imagery of disease in drama with the development of the cult of the healing hero/god Asclepius in fifth-century Athens. Asclepius, a son of Apollo, invented the art of healing, and became so good at it that he attempted to resurrect mortals, for Zeus destroyed him. But the Greeks couldn't make up their mind about him, so in cultic practice he was a god. Recognizing in this study the link between medicine and poetry that the Athenians drew, we shall see the placement of the god of physical healing near the Theater turns it into a locus of therapy for the polis.

Indeed, I shall further suggest in turn that it was the earlier associations among poetry, healing and immortality that might have led to the installation of Asclepius' shrine above the theater. Therefore, in this study I will need to move through a number of diverse and complex issues: the cult of Asclepius, the direct evocations of Asclepius in dramatic texts, the relationship of Apollo and Dionysus in cult, shrine locations, the City Dionysia, the Paian, katharsis, the great Plague, and nosological imagery tragic drama, especially Euripides. The Heracles will be of particular concern. I primarily focus on networks of conceptual associations, some easily recognizable, some latent, and thus for the latter especially I ask my audience to withhold judgment until all the ballots are counted.

An often overlooked aspect of the performance of drama is the physical presence of the characters on stage. Unlike all other forms of literature, drama insists on the body's reality. It has been often said that Greek tragedy brings in conflict the cooperative values of the polis with the aristocratic ideals of the hero, but drama in performance sharpens the split even further by embodying these values and making them walk the stage. Solon, Plutarch reports, left the theater once in disgust at seeing these realized figures from the past undermining the political harmony he strove to achieve. The poet, like Asclepius, returns to life the heroes of the legendary past. Aristophanes, whose comedies show a thorough acquaintance with the cult of Asclepius, plays on this practice in the *Frogs*, as Dionysus specifically aims to resurrect not a hero, but a poet who will save Athens. Before Aristophanes and Euripides, Pindar's *Pythian 3* epitomizes a recurrent Greek belief in the immortality that song confers as a recompense for inevitable death. *The Language of Disease in Tragedy*

Several decades ago scholars dismissed the metaphorical aspects of disease in drama. The word *nosos*, they maintained with little evidence, was too much a part of everyday language to have any metaphorical significance. The Greeks, like us, tended to call bad things sick. They erred, I believe, in making sweeping assumptions about poetic language in its historical situation, and in not considering how their own historical conditions might affect the way they read Greek texts. I do not think that we can assume that a culture lacking immunization shots and anaesthetic, or a city that had lost 1/4 to 1/3 of its population from a Plague, would have let connections of bad things to the language of disease slip by too easily. [2] It is unreasonable to assume that metaphors which seem bland and worn to us and in our every-day language would have also sounded similarly to Athenians 2500 years ago. It is more helpful, I submit, to ask new questions and see whether a drama's use of *nosos* participates in a larger structure of meaning for the drama and the culture that produces it. Understanding the force of nosological imagery requires resituating the dramatic texts historically, in both Euripides' century and ours. The afore-mentioned scholarship appeared between 1941 and 1962, a time when medicine has ameliorated, if not eliminated, most major curable diseases, and there was even hope for a cure for cancer. I suspect that metaphors of illness might not have had the appropriate resonance for those scholars and their colleagues. My impression of the modern history of the language of health is that words like "disease" and "plague" have much greater power now, in the era of AIDS, than they did two or three decades previously. The great gulf separating us from antiquity, perhaps so great we cannot bridge it, is our relative inexperience of mortality. We now have so great a control over our bodies that our appreciations of disease-shortened lifespans and widespread infant mortality have severely lessened. The pervasive violence of American culture and our terror and panic before AIDS are both the surest signs of this diminishment as well as its possible reversal. Just as AIDS has changed the semantics of illness in modernity, the Great Plague in Athens surely deepened an Athenian audience's sensitivity to a dramatic poet's deployment of such language. And this is probably an understatement. If Thucydides' description of the plague is at all accurate, then we cannot underestimate the power in the theater words like *nosos* had.[3]

I seek to discover the general metaphorical and semantic range that *nosos* had in the Theater of Dionysus. Thucydides predominantly uses this more general term, occasionally combining it with more specific adjectives like *pestilent*, but his descriptive language remains surprisingly non-specific; *loimos* itself is surprisingly rare. *Nosos* is also the predominant, if not exclusive, choice of Sophocles and Euripides. The specific term for plague, *loimos*, does not occur in the extant dramas of Euripides, and only once in Sophocles; line 28 of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the tragedy where one would most expect to find many instances. Since *loimos* does not present any metrical difficulties for a poet, this rarity might not entirely lack cause. Perhaps *nosos* becomes the word of choice for Thucydides and the tragedians because it tends to be used designate bad things in general. Its very vagueness thus would lend *nosos* a greater metaphorical potential.

Despite the reasonably frequent occurrence of specific terms for maladies both physical and psychological in Aeschylus and Sophocles, the language of disease achieves almost startling prominence in Euripidean drama. Thus, here I shall attempt to sketch out the metaphorical possibilities for disease in Euripidean drama.

First, however, we need to examine briefly the language of early Greek medicine, not only, as is typical practice, as a source for dramatic speech, but more for its use of political language to describe physical malady. I shall suggest then that Euripides later reverses the equation in employing medical language to depict political turmoil.

Two central concepts to early Greek medicine especially relevant here are that diseases enter the body from the outside through *poroi* and that health depends a proper balance of the body's different components. The human body continually experiences attack from external sources.[4] Some of these external things enter the brain and are manifested in thought or sensation, and others

introduce disease. The pre-Hippocratic writer Alcmaeon believed that good health arose from the equilibrium of the powers: "the bond of health is isonomia of the powers...., while the monarchia of one of them is the cause of disease..."[5] Health thus is cast as a political struggle between warring factions, almost a stasis. The comparison between the balance of the parts in a body and the state should sound familiar to students of Plato, and indeed Alcmaeon's theories influenced philosophers beginning with Empedocles, and, I believe, dramatists.

Moreover, the image of one standing apart from the others, gaining control and threatening the whole sounds not only political, but also fairly like the basic structure of much Greek drama, and in turn it suggests a more powerful metaphorical potential for disease than we have suspected. Typically, tragedy sets in opposition the conflicting values of the democratic polis and the aristocratic hero, who is usually a member of the royal household that rules the city of the play's locale. Thus, by mirroring a constant political concern of fifth-century Athens, drama enacts the tensions between the needs of the many and the desires of the one. Given this political current in Greek medical thought, the obvious acquaintance of the tragedians with the Hippocratic writings, and the political setting of the City Dionysia, it should not be surprising that disease becomes a live, not a dead, metaphor for the crises afflicting the political communities on stage. This metaphor becomes especially common after the outbreak of the plague in Athens. The Cult of Asclepius and the Theater of Dionysus .

The development of the cult of Asclepius in Athens and the range of myths involving him both associate him with Dionysus, the Greek god of, among other things, the theater. Thus, on the levels of theme, ritual and performance Asclepius is important to Greek drama in the last third of the fifth century and beyond. The cult of Asclepius was brought to Athens anywhere from one to nine years after the first outbreak of the great Plague in 430, although his myth, as the *Oresteia*, *Alcestis* and *Pythian 3* show, was sufficiently well-known to allow poets to refer to it in passing. The consensus now is that the cult of Asclepius was introduced at least to Attica, if not Athens, shortly after the outbreak of the Plague.[6] Even if we finally ascertain that there was no cultic activity in Athens until 420, this in itself would indicate the lasting impact of the Plague on Athenian imagination. Soon after the initial outbreak of the Plague, the Athenians tried to take Epidaurus militarily (Thuc. 2.56.4). Plutarch, mixing up the chronological sequence, attributes the Plague to this attack. Asclepius and Dionysus appear to cooperate or resemble each other on several levels. The first is the Eleusinian Mysteries, where Dionysus plays a key role and Asclepius' initiation was celebrated. Asclepius also mediates between Dionysus and more ascetic gods such as Apollo and Artemis.

The myth of Asclepius' birth possesses a remarkable homology with that of Dionysus. As Pindar tells the story in *Pythian 3*, Coronis lay with Apollo and conceived Asclepius, but she then bedded a mortal, without proper wedding rituals and in secret from Apollo. For this, Artemis killed Coronis and Apollo snatched the fetus from the pyre before it was consumed. This strongly resembles two myths of Dionysus, his birth, where Zeus saved him from the womb of the incinerated Semele, and the destruction of Ariadne. The involvement of Asclepius and Dionysus in the Mysteries and their similar birth legends are part of a larger set of shared rites and functions, which culminate in the installation of the Asklepieion next to the Theater of Dionysus. With the overlap between the myths of Dionysus and Asclepius and their participation in related rituals, we can see another example of the cooperation between Apollo and Dionysus, which probably comes as a surprise to students of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Throughout the important shrines to Apollo in Greece, especially Delphi, Dionysus plays an important part in cultic activity.[7] The two gods are often set in relation to each other iconographically, and the tragedians tend to associate Dionysus with Delphi as well, as is seen particularly in Euripides' *Ion*, a drama about another son of Apollo. A fourth century paean by Philodamus for the Dionysus festival at Delphi even attributes to Dionysus paeanic cries, thus directly equating the two gods.

With these associations in mind, I suggest that the placement of the Asklepieion immediately above the Theater of Dionysus is not an accident. Apollo and his healer son are at times interchangeable and through the spatial semantics of the shrines on the south slope of the Acropolis Apollo has access to the tragic festival. The popular tradition that arose soon after Sophocles' death that he introduced Asclepius to Athens signals the deeper relationship between the City Dionysia, Apollo and the tragic poet most closely associated with civic norms.[8] Besides the Eleusinian Mysteries (Aleshire 8), Asclepius also played a part in another festival of importance for Dionysus in Athens, the City Dionysia itself. From at least 420 B. C. E. the Asclepieia, the feast for Asclepius, was held on the day of the Proagon[9] before the City Dionysia; the Proagon was a ceremony in which the playwright would stand with his actors and announce the subjects of his plays. While the addition of Asclepius to the Eleusinian Mysteries acquired a ready explanation of his own initiation into them, we are left guessing as to why the Athenians chose to honor Asclepius on the day of the Proagon, which dates back at least to the construction of the Odeion by Pericles in 444 B. C. E. Unless these dates were an amazing coincidence, we are bound to ask what prompted them to honor the healing god as they were preparing to celebrate Dionysus in the theater, and I do not think we can avoid here Apollo's function as leader of the Muses and the associations in Greek culture between music and healing that were so strong that Sophocles came to be seen as Asclepius' sponsor in Athens. [Sophocles and Asclepius].

The spatial relation between Asklepieion and Theater of Dionysus recurs in the theater's seating arrangement of the Prohedria, "the seats in front" where important public officials such as priests and generals sat. Processional display and public ceremony were important components of the City Dionysia. The audience in turn visibly divided into 13 wedges, corresponding to the customary order of the ten tribes, with the Council occupying the central wedge and non-citizens the outer two.[10] Given this structural template, it seems reasonable to suggest that the seating plan in the Prohedria had meaning, and the extant arrangement places the chair of the priest of Asclepius immediately next to that of the priest of the Muses.[11] The inscriptions identifying the occupants of the stone thrones date from an Imperial era reworking of the Prohedria, but it appears the later reconstructions were based ultimately on a fifth-century Prohedria, and the inscription is likely copied from a throne of the fourth century[12]. Obviously, we cannot prove that in the last quarter of the fifth century these two priests sat together, but the arrangement is consistent with the more general associations I am trying to establish,[13] so the juxtaposition of the priests of Asclepius and the Muses in the theater does not seem accidental, and reduplicates and reinforces the significance of the larger adjacency of the Theater of Dionysus and the Asklepieion.

Another aspect of the Athenian Asklepieion that suggests some kind of significant relationship with the Theater of Dionysus below it is that it resembles no other Asclepius sanctuary in form and function. Even after its completion "it was neither an international colonizing sanctuary as was the Asklepieion at Epidaurus, nor the site of a great medical school as was that on Kos, nor the cult focus of a major Hellenizing monarchy as was the Pergamene Asklepieion." This temple had a particularly local origin and importance, I argue, because it arose in response to a specific event, the Plague of 430-427, which struck a fairly complex urbanized environment. Because of unsanitary conditions associated with urban crowding, Asclepius sanctuaries tended to be extra-urban, if not rural, in location. The common belief among sick people that a greater effort to reach a holy place will lead to greater reward further motivated the healing sanctuaries' typically remote location. Sanctuaries further need to be separated from everyday life. The Athenian Asklepieion, positioned on the slopes of the Acropolis and within the city walls, does not fit this pattern.[14] If, as Graf claims (184), Asclepius has strong associations with the forest and the wild, then the Athenian location is even more remarkable. The Athenian temple was called the City Asklepieion, with all connotations of such a designation.

With the growth of complexity and size of cities, illness became a problem of civilization and society, not just an individual concern. The untraditional placement of the Athenian Asklepieion within the city and its proximity to the Theater points to a distinctly motivated connection here between healing sanctuary and theater, and between the two sanctuaries and the polis. The roles that Asclepius played in the Eleusian Mysteries and the Proagon of the City Dionysia further this relationship. These connections and others indicate that the proximity of the Asklepieion to the Theater of Dionysus turns the latter into a symbolic place of healing for the polis. Thus, theaters do not stand next to Asclepius shrines so that sick people can catch a play during their cures; the play is part of the cure, and in Athens, at least, the remedy is not just for the individual, but for the city.

The situation of Asklepieia near theaters is actually so common, surprisingly so, that relationship between healing, music and theater becomes all the more apparent, and Asclepius himself begins to look like a theater god. Beginning with a late example, at Pergamon the Hellenistic theater lies near an Asklepieion dating back to 400 B. C. At Corinth, the theater lies closer (350 meters) to the Asklepieion than any other of the major civic structures; even the theater at Epidaurus is further from its Asklepieion than the Corinthian theater.[15] The shrine was converted from Apollo to Asclepius sometime in the last quarter of the fifth century, as was a typical pattern, and roughly the same time as the Corinthians built their theater (Stillwell 5). In Athens, the Theater of Dionysus may have received extensive reconstruction during the Peace of Nicias (421-16), which was also the time of the Asklepieion's construction. The orientation of the cavea of the Theater of Dionysus towards the Temple of Dionysus so that the spectators can always see god's shrine further suggests an analogous relationship between the Corinth theater and the Asklepieion, as the latter pair's orientation directed the spectators' attention beyond the stage toward the temple. The cavea of the fourth-century theater at Epidaurus, situated in the Asclepius sanctuary, also faced the temple. The theater at Delphi sits just above and faces the Temple of Apollo, with its Asklepieion slightly further down the slope.

The most well known relationship between an Asklepieion and a theater is at Epidaurus, the international center of the Asclepius cult, and this site could explain the relationship between the other temple-theater configurations, as it brings to completion features partial or latent in the other theaters. The Epidaurean theater was constructed sometime around 350 B.C.E., and, according to Lutz Keppel (1989), was conceived as whole as it currently stands and around a geometrical figure in the orchestra, the pentagram, that, Keppel hypothesizes, has specific mystical connotations for Pythagoreans. Keppel (102-3) relates an account by Lucian that the Pythagoreans called the pentagram "Health" and used the figure as a symbol for it. Along with the mathematically balanced proportions of the number of rows and sections, the pentagram thus forms part of the mathematical harmonies of the theater as a whole. Thus, Keppel concludes (104), "Hygieia" (Health) is the fundamental idea (Grundidee) of the theater of Asclepius, an idea that partakes of the healing powers the Pythagoreans attributed to music. The theater itself can cure.

While the Theater of Dionysus developed architecturally over time and thus lacked the original unifying idea of the theater at Epidaurus, I believe that the latter theater merely brings to the surface concepts latent in the performative context of the Athenian theater. With the idea always in mind that the Asklepieion was under construction between 420 and 416 and in an area immediately overlooking the shoulders of the tragic spectators, let us return to Euripidean drama. Disease and Stasis in the Heracles and Other Plays

The Heracles engages the full scope of our concerns here: combined image of disease and political strife, the theme of mortality, Asclepius and the paian and the return from the dead. This drama will also allow us to turn towards another thorny problem, the meaning of katharsis in the dramatic, but

not necessarily Aristotelean, tradition. The plot: while awaiting the return of Heracles from his 12 labors, his family is being persecuted by the tyrant Lycus, who has taken advantage of Thebes' political instability. The hero returns in the nick of time, having just fetched Cerberus from Hades, and kills Lycus. He enters the house to perform a sacrifice to Zeus, and the goddesses Iris and Lyssa/Madness appear and announce Hera has sent them to drive Heracles insane. Heracles mistakes his family for his enemies, killing his wife and children. Waking from his madness, he considers suicide, until his friend Theseus appears to offer him a home as a private citizen in Athens. Behind the immediately pressing concern of the play's plot, the fate of Heracles' family, is the political crisis afflicting Thebes. Euripides connects the city's political crisis with Heracles' madness through nosological imagery. In the prologue Heracles' mortal father Amphitryon describes Thebes at Lycus' attack as "this city sick with civil strife" (34). From the later instances it appears that Lycus did not come when the city was sick with strife but that he brought this disease to Thebes. After Lycus leaves the stage (?), the Chorus closes an unusually long speech with this metaphor (272-3) For the city does not think well, being sick with stasis and with evil purposes. When Heracles finally appears, he asks Megara how Lycus managed to gain control (541) Lycus the land's new ruler killed him. With the weapons of all, or was the land sick? Meg. Sick with stasis: he holds the seven-gated power of Ca. This triple occurrence of the same metaphor surely indicates its significance.

The metaphor recurs as part of a larger network of associations of disease, purity and politics. It prepares the way for the madness of Heracles, his fall, and his restoration into democratic society. The metaphor appears three times in the play's first half, and then disappears once Heracles enters the house for a preparatory sacrifice before he confronts Lycus, and then he goes mad. Once he appears again all talk of illness centers on him, climaxing in Theseus' assertion that because Heracles is sick, he is no longer Heracles. There must be some connection, so let us look at the play's medical language beginning with the point just before Iris and Lyssa appear. But first, a short detour for more background.

Several other plays, in particular the *Phoenissae*, deploy nosological imagery for the house or city. Significantly, no extant Euripidean play produced before the plague - that is the *Medea* and the *Alcestis* - broadens the concept of disease beyond the individual or couple. Admittedly, this is not a huge sample, but the fragments of the lost plays, and the dates of the dramas' production, indicate that Euripides may have been even more interested in the metaphor than we can show. All of the identifiable fragments that use illness as a metaphor for civic turmoil or moral decline come from dramas written around or after 415; that is, roughly about the time of the *Heracles* and *Phoenissae* or later.

The *Heracles* not only deploys the language of disease and cure, but it also keeps Asclepius hovering in the background. At no point does the text of the *Heracles* refer directly to Asclepius, but aspects of the Heracles myth include and are associated with Apollo's son, so a play where disease is an important metaphor may evoke Asclepius without naming him. Of the three other tragedies featuring Heracles, *Trachiniae*, *Philoctetes* and *Alcestis*, the latter two name Asclepius and the nosological language marks all of the Heracleian dramas. The only other tragedy to name Asclepius is the *Hippolytus*, and there the character Theseus is often seen as a mythological doublet for Heracles because he often accompanies Heracles, as in this play, or engages in very similar activities, such as battling Amazons and Centaurs.[16] But the boldest exploit they share is the journey to the world of the dead, traditionally seen as the greatest of exploits possible for a mortal. This Heracleian tradition is so strong that Aristophanes, when he has his Dionysus seek a suitable disguise for his descent, casts him as Heracles. In the *Heracles* Theseus reminds us that it was Heracles who saved him chained in Hades (1170). Moreover, in versions of the *Hippolytus* myth other than the one found in Euripides' extant play, Phaedra falls in love with Hippolytus while Theseus is in Hades; this is the case in Seneca's play. In Sophocles the divinized Heracles appears *ex machina* to order Philoctetes to go and be healed by Asclepius. Further, Asclepius' ambiguous

status in Greek culture as sometimes hero, sometimes, god mirrors Heracles' duality as, in Pindar's words (Nem. 3.22).

The Heracleian defiance of death links his mythical tradition to Asclepi, and Euripides' Heracles strengthens any possible associations by shifting the usual sequence of events to stress the link between his descent to Hades to fetch Cerberus and his mad murder of his family. No other literary source places the murders after the labors, and the juxtaposition of the return from Hades with this disaster suggests some deeper connection. By presenting Theseus as Heracles' savior, Euripides further reminds us that Heracles enters the play having just violated that most precious of lines between men and gods, death. This is, after all, the second surviving Euripidean drama that features Heracles returning a human from Hades. Anne Burnett observes (179, but without the further implications I am drawing) that Heracles "has robbed Death and played soter to other mortals; he looks like another Asclepius, and having now in a sense conferred life, he cannot be left at large." Given the consequence of being Asclepius, imitating him is a dangerous activity, and the only one who can raise the dead safely is, as I (and Aristophanes) have suggested, is the dramatic poet. And when Euripides writes and stages his Heracles, Asclepius hovers thematically and literally in the background, looking over the shoulders of the spectators in the Theater of Dionysus. If the circumstances of the performance of Greek tragedy have real significance for understanding the surviving texts, then I do not see how we can ignore this proximity of the healing cult to a site that witnessed so much talk of disease.[17] The plague inspired the dramatic poets' use of illness, both literal and metaphorical, and the plague brought the cult of Asclepius to Athens, where it was installed next to the theater. Thus a complex interrelationship between real plague, cult and theater needs to be kept in mind when we approach individual plays. Remembering this context, let us return to how these matters unfold as Heracles enters the house.

During the brief agitated scenes before the disaster occurs, there are several different evocations of the paian, the ritual song that, depending on context, means either a song of victory or one of healing. The Heracles seems to exploit this ambivalence. In a recent study of "paenic ambiguity" in Greek literature,[18] Ian Rutherford observes that Greek poets played on the ambiguity between the three classes of paian: apotropaic, celebratory, and those combining elements of the two. Paian is both the epithet for "the healer", first applied to Apollo and then to his son Asclepius, and in literature, Rutherford notes (87), there is an ambiguity between paian poem and paian healer; the latter is older and its function may be transferred to the former. In the Cyclops, Seaford observes (1984: 220), the chorus of satyrs mocks the Cyclops' apotropaic cries of pain as signaling instead their victory over him. This ambiguity also allows the situation of paian cries in drama to take on added importance for the audience, and such is the case of the Heracles, which is one of the dramas where a (Rutherford 89) "celebratory paian [precedes] a reversal in action." Such a reversal indicates more than dramatic irony or added poignancy in a drama where disease is an important metaphor. The city is sick with stasis, and Heracles thus appears as a healer of this disease, so the chorus' praise of Heracles in the second stasimon becomes a healing paeon. The chorus suggests (687-700) that Heracles is as worthy of paeans as Apollo (Bond, ad loc), and much of the thought of last antistrophe applies as much to Heracles as Apollo, as both are the son of Zeus (Dios ho pais 696); another instance where Heracles takes over functions and images associated with Asclepius. These associations continue in the immediately pursuant scene between Amphitryon and Lycus, where Heracles' mortal father lures the tyrant into a false sense of security with some rather black irony. Lycus observes that Heracles can never return to save Megara, to which Amphitryon responds (719): "No, unless one of the gods resurrects him." Of course, in Greek tragedy the gods oppose such activity and explicitly frown on those who try, such as Asclepius; again, the cult shrine stands just behind the shoulders of the audience. The chorus thus first considers singing the celebratory paeon, but perhaps also raises an apotropaic one, and then when Iris and Lyssa appear above the house (just after the chorus has praised Heracles' escape from Hades), the terrified men cry out (820-21): "Oh lord Paian, may you be an averter of woes for me." They ask Apollo as Healer to protect them from the two goddesses, one of whom is Madness, who,

when besieging Heracles, is a type of disease. The earlier triumphal paean has turned to its opposite. Heracles has not brought a cure, but a worsening of the disease afflicting the city, and only his destruction can save the city. He is thus both cure and cause, the proverbial *pharmakon*. To the frightened cries of the Chorus, Iris answers in terms suggesting that Heracles is a surrogate victim, a *pharmakos*, for the city (824-26):[19] For the city we have come as no harm, but we attack the house of a single man whom they say is born from Zeus and Alcmene. The composition of the iambic lines of the Greek verse stresses and enacts the opposition between the safe city (*polei*) and the single man (*henos andros*) who will suffer; the contrast between the secure many and the endangered/dangerous one is paradigmatic of the scapegoat. The further equation drawn between Heracles and Thebes strengthens this tie. The mania the gods will cast on him consists of a "pedicidal disturbance of his mind"(835-36). This term *taragmos* and related words is used in fifth-century Greek to indicate mental, corporeal and political disturbance and anarchy, as seen in the Hippocratic texts, Aristophanes, Thucydides and Euripides. Heracles, quickly assessing the dangers confronting Thebes asks his father (533), "Into what *taragmon* have I come?" Amphitryon in turn asks Heracles not to disturb the city before Lycus is killed. The new disturbances do not fall on the city, however, but on Heracles, who recognizes on his own when he awakes from his madness (1091-92) how "I have fallen in a terrible disturbance (*taragmati*) of my mind." Now this greatest of heroes, one called upon with a paean, who entered to save the sick city, needs healing himself. Heracles looks about him and cannot understand what has happened, and thus he asks (1107): "Who will heal (*iasetai*) my ignorance?"[20] For Heracles not to feel diseased, he now needs a healer, who turns out to be Theseus, and as Theseus manages to convince Heracles to continue life, but as a common citizen, in Athens. Unless the drama's language and imagery are casual and coincidental, the action has displaced the disease of stasis from the city to Heracles. Thebes thus experiences a cure of its stasis through the internal stasis of Heracles, a cure that can be called homeopathic -- treating a disease with a disease. Hippocratic teaching held that health depended on a proper balance of the body's different elements and it cast disease politically as a breakdown of *isonomia* where one element achieves a tyranny over the rest. To restore harmony the body must experience a *katharsis* of the element believed to be causing the instability. This last term, of course, is fraught with danger for the critic venturing anywhere near tragedy, due to the stasis surrounding Aristotle's *Poetics*. I shall postpone discussion of that issue for a bit. I do wish to stress, however, that the frequency of disease as a metaphor, especially a political one, in the Heracles does raise the question of the cure for the body politic.

If I am right that the medical metaphor of stasis as disease is then displaced on to Heracles as he becomes mad, then he definitely serves as a *pharmakon/os* who falls from the heroic heights to life as a normal citizen in order to preserve civic stability. Thus, given the nosological metaphorical structure, it is appropriate that Theseus, emblem of Athenian democracy in such drama dramas as the *Suppliants* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, provide the last words concerning illness, and do so in an immediately political context (1413-14). On the one hand, Theseus acknowledges that Heracles' madness has humbled, if not humiliated, him to the point that Heracles' life of heroic glory (*kleinos*) cannot continue, but, on the other, that moving Heracles towards a more democratic life means a cure for the nosos. Being humbled, *tapeinos*, means health, and thus "all the city of Athens" will honor Heracles once he goes there with Theseus; entry to and honor in democratic Athens is ultimately predicated on Heracles not being a bearer of the nosos of stasis. I do not mean to suggest that these readings exclude all others or that Asclepius is the only key to understanding Greek drama, which is as complex an art form and, in Burke's terms, a social action as any Western literature has seen. I have, however, tried to ask a different set of questions about tragedy in Athens: What happens if we take nosological imagery and language seriously? Why does this imagery seem to increase in frequency after the construction of the City Asklepieion in Athens? What significance does the appearance of Asclepius and related themes have intragedy? Why do Asclepius temples sit so often next to theaters? These related questions are part of a complex system of meaning generated from the conditions of performance. In Athens after the Plague poets drew on traditional associations of healing and music to suggest a balm for the troubled audience. As civic

strife during these years increasingly spread like a disease through Athens, the dramatic poets drew on other established associations between the body and the body politic to develop an extended metaphor of disease in society. By examining this disease, the city could have a chance of a cure. The theater could bring civic tensions to a new intensity, and the nosos in the Theater of Dionysus could purify the polis of its nosos.

An Athenian sitting in the Theater of Dionysus watched dramas not just as an individual but as part of a collective, and the pattern of seating in wedges according to tribe and social status reinforced the collective sense. Scholarly consideration of what Aristotle meant by catharsis has continually focused on the emotional reactions of individuals as individuals, not as members of a political or social whole. The ritual and the medical, as well as the political, do in fact overlap in the language of Greek drama, as we have seen in this study, and thus drama acts as a form of social medicine, a pharmakon for the polis. In the pharmacy of the Theater, Asclepius is never far away. G.S. Kirk, JERaven, M. Schofield, *The presocratic philosophers*, 2nd ed Cambridge 1983 no. 310, p.260

ENDNOTES*****

[1].Bernays 1880: 14. The translation is mine, which I have provided instead of the one by Barnes, as I my more literal translation preserves more of Bernays sense that he was following the Aristotle's medical footsteps.

[2] Subsequently, the importance of disease as a theme in Sophoclean drama is examined in an article by Biggs, and in Euripides' *Orestes* by Smith. These studies grazed the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

[3] There are some signs that scholars are beginning to overcome their predecessors' reluctance to make anything of disease language in drama. In a recently published German dissertation on the representation of doctors in Greek literature, Peter Cordes (38) advocates the metaphoricity of disease and criticizes those who neglect to see it.

[4] Padel (54) observes: "Outside cause, therefore, is cardinal in Hippocratic nosology. Disease comes from ta esionta, 'the things coming in,' exothen, 'from outside'."

[5] Longrigg, 167. See also Padel, esp. 58-59. The most readily available and useful discussion of the theoretical basis of Hippocratic medicine is by W. H. S. Jones in the Loeb Classics Library of Hippocrates (Cambridge, Mass. 1923) lv-lxiii.

[6] On an early date and as a reaction to the Plague see Burford 20-1, Pade 145, Mikalson and Parker 275. Contra Edelstein, Burford argues: "The cult's advance to international status was most likely a direct result of the great plague in Athens. The two visitations of 430 and 427 gave rise to exactly that state of depression compounded of loneliness, terror and despair in which one would turn to any new source of healing."

[7] On the copresence of Dionysus and Apollo in literature, art and cult, see Burkert 1985: 223-25, with fuller bibliography, and more recently Des Bouvrie 106-8.

[8] On the tradition of linking Sophocles and Asclepius, see Aleshire 9-11. Aristophanes *Frogs*, composed almost immediately after the deaths of Euripides and Sophocles, provides the clearest

indication of the common reputation of each. Also, in that comedy Dionysus descends to Hades out of a "hunger" for Euripides.

[9] On the dating of these aspects of the City Dionysia see the correction of Pickard-Cambridge's doubts by Goold and Lewis, 64-67.

[10] On the semantics of seating arrangements in the Theater of Dionysus, see Winkler, especially 37-42, in Winkler and Zeitlin. .

[11] See Maass' seating plan, 141-44, which follows Fiechter's work. Maas 79 notes that the practice of Prohedria dates from archaic times. See also Pickard -Cambridge 1946, 19-21.

[12] See Maass 44, 133, and Aleshire 83 n.5.

[13] Maass (18) notes that the office of the occupants probably changed over the course of time, especially during the Roman empire, and in fact Asclepius was important during the Hellenistic and Imperial eras. However, Asclepius rapidly grew in importance during the last quarter of the fifth-century, so we should not exclude either possibility. Aleshire (82), citing IG II2 354.15-17, notes that "the priest in 3287B.C. was honored for having joined with the epimeletai in preserving eukosmia in the theatre."

[14] On the typically extra-urban or liminal siting of Asklepieia, see Graf, esp. 168-72. However, Graf, in my view, seems to overplay the binary opposition between city and country when he insists that the Athenian Asklepieion lies (170) "in einem liminalen Raum zwischen Stadt und Burg" (in a liminal space between city and town), with distinctly rural associations. The Theater of Dionysus was definitely part of the Athenian civic space, both physical and conceptual, and the Asklepieion stands even closer to the Parthenon. A brief glance at the opening of Plato's Phaedrus will show that important demarcation was not the Acropolis but the larger city walls.

[15] See Roebuck 1, who adds that the proximity of the temple to other shrines and recreational structures made the elaborate such arrangements at Epidaurus and Pergamon unnecessary in Corinth. On the topography Epidaurus see now Koppel 1989.

[16] Asclepius is named by Heracles at the end of the Philoctetes (1437), and by Apollo at the beginning of the Alceste. In the Hippolytus, the huge wave carrying the bull conceals the "rock of Asclepius."

[17] The layout of this slope of the Acropolis, I shall argue in another study, has implications of Heracles' appearance and final instructions in Sophocles' Philoctetes.

[18] On the paeon in general, see now Lutz 1992.

[19] Here I rely on Foley's insightful study of this play, but my stress on the surrogacy mechanism and cause, and my de-emphasis of violence in sacrifice, departs from, or perhaps supplements Foley's analysis.

[20] On the more specific medical symptoms ascribed to Heracles see Bond, especially his comments on line 1407.