The text above is difficult for several reasons (notably the meaning of ἀρτηρία), but the reading which Dawe corrects in 1055 shows no sign of corruption in the MSS. and has not struck most editors as a problem¹. Dawe’s suggestion, ξυνυτίον, is not accepted by the editors of the New OCT of Sophocles (or even put in their apparatus), and so may soon fall into oblivion². But Dawe’s objections to ξυνυτίον are not as unfounded as recent editors would have us believe; and in examining his arguments and pointing out what he has missed, we learn something about the Trachiniae, and about a recurring problem with Dawe’s version of the play.

Dawe states, “…there is one word which stands aloof from its context: the word συνυτίον, a dry, cold, tame, and unemotional statement of location: the sort of word that might be used by an unimaginative estate agent”³. Dawe is wrong. As virtually all modern editors have noted, the robe is personified in this passage, and so συνυτίον is much more than a statement of location⁴. What it exactly means in this context, however, is not entirely clear. It is usually translated ‘sharing a house with’⁵, the primary meaning of the word, and Davies ad loc. lists several parallel usages of συνυτίον: El. 784, Phil. 1168, and OC 1237-8. But if that is what συνυτίον means here, it does not mean it in the same sense as it does in Davies’ parallels.

In the passage from the Electra, Clytaemnestra complains that Electra has been ἐκπίνουσιν ἡμῖν ἐκπίνουσιν ἐκπίνουσιν ἡμῖν (El. 785-6)⁶, which fits nicely with the passage under discussion (and I do not doubt that her drinking of blood is as metaphorical as the robe’s gulping of ἀρτηρία). But the use of συνυτίον in 784 is emphatically not metaphorical. Electra has literally ‘shared a house with’ Clytaemnestra, as her family member, and it is the fact that this blood-sucking behavior comes from within the oikos that Clytaemnestra finds so objectionable. We might try to transfer a similar sentiment to Heracles, who would then find it particularly devious that the robe comes from one who is his house-mate⁷, but that is not what our text says: ‘it [the robe] gulps down the passages of the lungs, sharing a house (with them)’.
The next two parallels are closer in that the use of συνοικεῖν is clearly metaphorical, and it does carry a negative connotation: In the passage from Phil., the chorus states that Philoctetes ‘shares a house with’ ἀυθικός; similarly, in the OC, the chorus states that πρόσαντα/ κακὰ κακῶν ‘shares a house with’ Oedipus in his old age (1237-8). In both of these passages, the sense of συνοικεῖν is that these evils have become an enduring part of the heroes’ daily lives. The same cannot be said for Heracles’ robe, which he has had on for less than a day, and which is grammatically συνοικοῦν with various parts of Heracles’ anatomy, not with Heracles the person. Rather, we expect the word συνοικεῖν to have something to do with the immediacy and urgency of Heracles’ pain, and it is hard to see how the meaning ‘sharing a house with them’ provides this. Dawe’s objections, then, are not without some basis, and we can see why he suggested the emendation that he did: ξυνιποῦν, for all its faults, does give the sort of sense that we want to find in the passage.

We need not resort to emendation, however. The passage makes good, even stunning dramatic sense if we allow for a more specific meaning for συνοικοῦν than modern editors have. Συνοικεῖν, as Earle notes, is frequently “used of wedlock” (10), and I believe that the larger context of the Trachiniae as well as the specific context of this play justify taking it in this sense here. The motivation for the action in the play is Deianeira’s attempt to save her marriage to Heracles. In fact, Deianeira uses the very word in question (in its less specific sense) to explain her position:

τὸ δ’ αὐτῷ ξυνιπεῖν τὴν θυγή τίς ἐν γυνή
dύνατο, κοινωνοῦσα τῶν αὐτῶν γάμων; (545-6) (11).

To συνοικεῖν with another woman would be to deny her own marriage in a basic sense, by ‘sharing’ it. Deianeira’s point is that married people are supposed to be exclusively ‘sharing a house’. When, therefore, the robe which Deianeira assumed would make Heracles hers alone (cf. 575 ff.) becomes ‘married’ to the flesh and lung-passages of Heracles, it creates a bitter and dramatically effective irony. The robe, unlike either Deianeira or Iole, has an absolutely exclusive relationship with Heracles’ body. Deianeira cannot successfully remain married to Heracles, but her robe does, with grim results.

The specific context of the scene, moreover, contains language which is suggestive of the marriage ceremony and so justifies taking the word as I have. Heracles will shortly complain that he is crying out ἄστε παρθένος (1071). Παρθένος is translated fairly as ‘girl’ by Jameson (12), but more specifically it is an unmarried young female of marriageable age. (Note that at 148 Deianeira describes the transition of marriage as becoming ἄντι παρθένου γυνή.) Next, when Heracles is about to reveal himself to Hyllus, he states δείξω γὰρ τὰ δ’ ἐκ καλυμμάτων; (1078). As Seaford recognizes, these lines are “developed into a subtle allusion to the ritual of the ἀνακαλυπτήρια, the unveiling of the bride at the wedding banquet” (13). In