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A New Language for Heroes: Odysseus, Ajax, and Sophistic Language in Attic Tragedy

Scott Barnard

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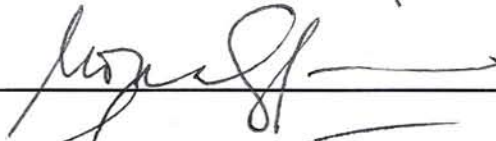
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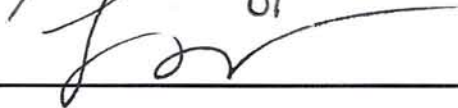
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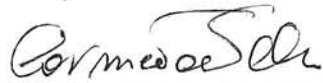
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**A NEW LANGUAGE FOR HEROES:
ODYSSEUS, AJAX, AND SOPHISTIC LANGUAGE
IN ATTIC TRAGEDY**

BY

SCOTT A. BARNARD

B.A., ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2003

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts
Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2011

DEDICATION

To my wife, Erin Barnard, without whom none of this would have been possible.

To Michael and Mari Barnard, for your love and tremendous support,
and for twice making New Mexico home.

To Carolyn and Michael Ganon, for your steadfast love and your encouragement on this
journey, and for showing me how to take the first step.

To Leland Barnard and Kelly Ganon, for showing me the tremendous places your
ambitions can take you, and then showing me why it is so good to be home.

To Kenny Ray, Allison, and Gray Stansbury, for helping me remember that there is
always laughter and adventure to be found, if you know where to look.

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ABSTRACT

My objective in this project is to explore the ways in which the Homeric figures of Odysseus and Ajax are reinterpreted for the tragic stage by Sophocles and Euripides, with particular emphasis on the presence of marked sophistic modes and values of speech. My thesis begins with an overview of the sophistic movement and a discussion of the philosophical and stylistic tenets of sophism. Based on these, I theorize that during fifth century BC a civic anxiety over the power of sophistic rhetoric develops in Athens and finds unique expression in tragic poetry.

Next, I define the particular rhetorical styles and traditions for depicting Odysseus and Ajax in the Homeric epics; I then explore the ways the playwrights redeploy these tropes to render tragic characters that reflect contemporary concerns and questions about the power and responsible use of civic speech. In doing so, I identify strategies employed by both figures in Homer to persuade a variety of audiences and the specific manners in which these strategies are engendered in the tragic re-imaginings of both characters.

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Introduction

Homeric Epic and Athenian Drama

The late fifth century B.C. was a tumultuous era for Greece, a time of military victory and defeat, of poverty and prosperity, of ambitious men and the often disastrous ends they pursued. During the last forty years of the fifth century Athens in particular experienced a tremendous fall from power as over the course of the Peloponnesian War it went from the preeminent *polis* and leader of the Delian League to a conquered state with little control over its own government. However, alongside the many misfortunes of the war—the plague, disastrous military expeditions, and ultimately the overthrow of the Athenian state by pro-oligarchic forces¹—there flourished a period of profound intellectual and artistic activity that offers a unique glimpse into the ideologies of the world’s first democracy as it is pressed repeatedly into crisis. As is made apparent through Thucydides’ account of this period in Athenian democracy, the fundamental mechanism by which the Athenian state functions and perpetuates itself is through the civic speech of its citizens. As in this radical democracy all legislative and policy decisions were in the hands of the city council (*boule*) composed of citizen members and were decided by popular vote, and the administration of justice was likewise the responsibility of citizen judges (*dikastai*), the ability to speak persuasively on one side of an issue or another held great sway over the outcome of civic decisions and thus played a supreme role in guiding the policy making of the state.²

¹ On the plague, see Thucydides 2.47; on military disasters, see for example the expedition against Syracuse at 6.8-7.82; on the fall of the democratic state, see 8.62.

² Strassler (1996) 580-1.

It is because of the tremendous emphasis and authority granted to speech that Athens came to be known as a *logopolis*, a “city of words”³ where, according to Thucydides’ Cleon, citizens became expert “spectators of words” (3.38.4). Against this very backdrop of a body of citizens who are not only spectators to but also performers of speeches, this study will examine the rhetorical performances and contests that are vocalized on the tragic stage at the city’s most important dramatic festival, the City Dionysia. The tragic performance at the City Dionysia was the grand finale in a series of highly ritualized displays of the wealth, influence, and power of the Athenian state.⁴ The exact meaning of these displays and the extent to which they should influence our reading of tragic performance, however, is a point of vigorous contention among modern scholars. Some scholars are strongly averse to reading too close a connection between what happens on the tragic stage and the real-life civic experiences of its audience, and that any attempt to do so risks reducing tragic poetry to a mere instrument of propaganda.⁵ More important to these scholars is the aesthetic quality of tragedy and the *pathos* created by the suffering of its characters. Other scholars embrace the notion that the rituals of the City Dionysia and the tragic performance can be taken together to create an atmosphere of civic collectivity that unites the *polis* and the citizen body and reinforces Athenian identity.⁶ For these scholars the tragic performance exposes questions or even confirms problematic values that are central to the public and private lives of its audience.

³ Goldhill (1996) 57-78; Croally (2008) 59.

⁴ See Goldhill (1991) 100-106 for a thorough description of these rituals.

⁵ See, for example, Griffin (1998) 39-50.

⁶ See, for example, Gregory (2002) 145-162. For further discussion on both camps see Allan (2008) 5-6.

This very important discussion on the social function of tragedy cannot be given its due consideration here, but this study will take as its premise the notion that the fifth-century audience of any tragedy could recognize modes, styles, and values of speech on the lips of tragic characters that were familiar from their participation in the civic life of the *polis*. With the Athenians continuing to engage in the Peloponnesian War, I shall argue that competing ideologies concerning the proper and fair use of public speech create an atmosphere of civic anxiety as the full implications of a system that equates rhetorical and political power come to light. This anxiety finds expression on the tragic stage in a variety of ways, but the most significant among these are the *agones* or competing rhetorical performances that are a hallmark of the tragic genre. Moreover, when these *agones* are staged between figures from Homeric epic, I argue that they lend close insight to the crisis over proper civic discourse and treatments of equal and unequal speakers. Two factors in particular make Homeric figures perfect for tragic re-imagination and as agents in plays that employ a critical analysis of rhetorical power. First, more so than other mythological figures, Homeric heroes are rhetorical stylists by default, as speechmaking is not only fundamental to the heroic mandate,⁷ but is also one of the primary avenues by which they can achieve the *kleos* (fame) that fuels the heroic drive.⁸ To this effect, Homeric figures come to the tragic stage with traditional stylistic traits and ideological stances on the power of rhetoric that, as we shall see, are employed to reflect changing attitudes in Athens. The second reason that tragic representations of Homeric figures are charged with such power is the preeminence awarded to the *Iliad* and

⁷ For Phoenix's famous directive that heroes should be "both speakers of words and doers of deeds," see *Iliad* 9.443.

⁸ On the variety of forms of heroic speech acts see Martin (1989) 12-42; on the expression of anger through speech as a fundamental element of Homeric heroism see Walsh (2005) 141-157.

the *Odyssey* in the education and civic orientation of young citizens.⁹ On the tragic stage this preeminence not only lends a tremendous amount of authority to the ideologies exemplified by each figure, but also gives the sense that in presenting conflicts between these figures at the City Dionysia, playwrights were gesturing toward fundamental elements of Athenian ideology.

Although several Homeric figures appear on the tragic stage, this study will concentrate primarily on representations of Odysseus and Ajax—characters who have diametrically opposed rhetorical philosophies and styles, and who at specific points in both epic and tragedy find themselves in contention with one another. Part I of this study considers the ways in which Homer’s Odysseus is made heroic specifically because he is *polytropos* (ingenious, very clever) in thought and, more importantly, in speech. This emphasis on clear thought and articulate speech locates Odysseus in a different heroic paradigm from many other Homeric heroes, thereby endowing him with a skill set that proves indispensable for the Achaean war effort.¹⁰ At several points in the *Iliad* Odysseus’ proclivity for speech in delicate situations demonstrates its utility as he is able not only to dissolve panic (book 2) but also to prevent the unnecessary eruption of further infighting (book 9). As we shall see, Odysseus is successful in each instance because he employs a rhetorical strategy that anticipates the effect his words will have on his audience, a skill that allows him to choose his words carefully for their most positive reception. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus’ rhetorical skill is even more clearly revealed as fundamental to his heroism as he successfully navigates a number of conflicts through

⁹ Plato calls Homer “the educator of all Greece” (*Republic* 606e) and often in his dialogues Homeric citation is used to lend authority to a point (cf., among many other examples, *Symposium* 175b.-c.); on the pedagogic use of Homeric epic, see Jaeger (1967) 31-43.

¹⁰ Pucci (1987) 56-58, 144-146.

rhetorical dexterity where a martial solution would surely have failed. At key points in the narrative such as the *Outis* pun of book 9¹¹ or in his near-encounter with the Sirens in book 11, Odysseus displays a keen awareness of the power and utility of speech. Moreover, the heroic qualities of Odysseus' speech are emphasized even further when one recalls that a large portion of the text (books 9-12) is composed of a sustained rhetorical performance by Odysseus that has the specific goal of procuring aid from the Phaeacians.

This is the Odysseus that is inherited by Sophocles and Euripides for tragic representation, and both playwrights re-imagine him in ways that make unique use of his heroic capacity for speech. As we shall see, as the fifth century advances and as both the Peloponnesian War and internal Athenian anxiety over rhetorical power grow increasingly dire, the rhetorical heroism of Odysseus shifts from a positive force that is able to resolve deadlocked civic disputes to a more vile one that seeks to take advantage of the inequalities between speakers for his own gain. Part II of my study offers a thorough analysis of each of Odysseus' appearances on the tragic stage at length. Sophocles and Euripides, perhaps under the influence of a "cross reception" between one another, each in their own way stage versions of the Homeric Odysseus that evaluate and question the civic value of a heroism that can and does exert its control over less adept speakers at will. Significantly, manifestations of Odysseus created by both playwrights employ with increasing conspicuousness a similar tactic for persuading opponents in *agones*: the hijacking of his opponents' language and redirection of its meaning against their own argument. What emerges, as we shall see, is a trend for depicting Odysseus that moves from a rather more favorable stance allowing the character some room to consider

¹¹ Podlecki (1961) 125ff.

the full implications of the power of rhetoric to one that is quite a bit less favorable, where much like rhetorical power itself Odysseus haunts the dramatic narrative from offstage as an intangible but insurmountable force.

In the character of Ajax we find both in the verses of Homer and on the tragic stage a foil for the rhetorical heroism of Odysseus. Part III considers the Homeric Ajax—a man of few but powerful words, who finds value only in the glory of martial victory and is suspicious or dismissive of those who would attempt to win *kleos* by any other avenue. Rather, Ajax pursues a more tangible heroism that can be measured in defeated enemies and protected allies, one that awards honor for observable prowess on the battlefield and not for skillful rhetorical maneuvering in the council chamber. In the *Iliad* Ajax accomplishes this through the two elements that are most fundamental to his character—the tremendous size that makes him a formidable adversary to anyone that would cross spears with him and the stalwart resolve that not only makes him a tenacious defensive element for his allies but also gives rise to an ideological inflexibility and devotion to the heroic *ethos*. This intractability, coupled with a reluctance to engage in grandiose rhetoric, creates marked differences between the speech of Ajax and that of other Homeric heroes. In the *Iliad* the majority of Ajax's words come as vehement battlefield exhortations that draw power from the force of their delivery rather than from rhetorical guile. Significantly, his sole appearance in the *Odyssey* takes Ajax to the opposite extreme, as Odysseus' entreaties to him are met not with thundering words but with an undaunted and wrathful silence that refuses to engage in speech at all.

It is precisely this rhetorical spectrum—from booming martial voice to resolute silence—that marks the extremities of Ajax's speech in Homeric epic. In the tragic

representation of Ajax Sophocles extends the boundaries of this spectrum to even greater extremes. Part IV discusses Sophocles' interpretation of the hero in the *Ajax*, where in his madness he first directs his combat voice at Athena—a lapse into *hubris* that is devoid of the good sense for which Ajax is praised in the *Iliad*. As Ajax comes to realize the error in this misguided directive as well as the folly in his attempted violence against the Greek host, he is first forced into a rhetorical situation for which his traditional curtness has left him poorly equipped and is forced to use language to deceive those closest to him; next, he resolves that the only honorable option left to him is to die by his own hand. As I shall argue, the manner and location of Ajax's suicide mark it as a public action, a startling rhetorical performance of a unique kind that unequivocally rejects the shift in the heroic code that led him to this act. By virtue of the fact that his lifeless body remains on stage for the remainder of the play, in death Ajax retains what I describe as a “speaking silence” that is not unlike the one he used against Odysseus in book 9 of the *Odyssey*, and in part it is this sustained performative silence that makes possible the honorable burial of his corpse at the end of the play. In his reinterpretation of the Homeric Ajax and in this particular staging of a hero who has such close associations with the Athenian *polis*,¹² Sophocles calls attention to a growing sense of civic anxiety over the power of rhetoric to shape the outcomes of conflicts that in the lives of the tragedy's audience are very real.

Rhetorical Power and Sophistry

A key element in our consideration of the subtle and inquisitive gestures that Sophocles and Euripides make toward the forces of civic speech will be the craft of sophistry, the study and art of meticulously calculated and expertly executed rhetorical

¹² Whitman (1958) 67-86.

performances that are crafted specifically to enchant the minds of its audience. For the purposes of this study, I use the term Sophist to refer to a diverse group of teachers, writers, and speakers who operated with increasing conspicuousness in late fifth-century Athens and who later served as oppositional figures in several Platonic dialogues. The Sophists contributed to the intellectual atmosphere of late fifth and early fourth-century Athens in two important ways. In the first place, as thinkers they considered and questioned some of the basic premises of human knowledge.¹³ Is the information about our reality obtained through sense perception infallible or inherently flawed? How can one determine the difference between what is true and what appears true, and what is the relationship between thought, speech, and reality? In the civic sphere, how much knowledge is derived from truth and how much is socially conditioned? Questions such as these lead naturally to ones that have a much more immediate impact on the social lives of Athenian citizens. What is justice and who is just? Can justice be taught? If so, who can teach it? In the Sophists' attempts to answer these questions, G. B. Kerferd notes two dominant themes that serve as centerpieces to the sophistic approach: "...the need to accept relativism in values and elsewhere without reducing all to subjectivism, and the belief that there is no area of human life or the world as a whole which should be immune from the understanding achieved through reasoned argument."¹⁴

The second and more socially significant contribution made by the Sophists during this period were as educators who instead of founding formal academies with large student bodies acted as private tutors to individual students for exorbitant fees. The training that sophistic teachers promised was not one meant to be available to the masses

¹³ See Guthrie (1971) 44-49, 148-60 for a more complete discussion of the broad and complex questions raised by Sophists.

¹⁴ Kerferd (1981) 2.

of the Athenian populace; rather it was made available only to those who could both afford it and would be best suited to utilize these acquired skills with success.¹⁵ Sophistic tutors trained students in a kind of secondary curriculum that concentrated primarily on language and literature, arithmetic, and athletics. The ultimate purpose of this education was to train students in a methodology that would allow them both to create and articulate the reasoned arguments necessary to find answers to the questions noted above.¹⁶ Beyond this philosophical benefit, sophistic training offered its students a more practical advantage: they received extensive training in the rhetorical skills that are necessary for participating in political life and that translate so directly to civic power.

There is a controversial point of particular importance that sophistic training takes as its premise, one that was a matter of great intellectual debate in fifth-century Athens and as such lies at the dramatic center of several tragedies: the extent to which excellence and virtue are inherent in a person's nature (*physis*), or whether they are characteristics that are shaped by the influence of the external world (*nomos*) and are therefore trainable. The Sophists insisted not only that one's virtues were malleable and trainable things, but also that through persuasive language it is possible to guide and train the *physis* of another person. The implications of this assertion posed serious questions about a variety of aspects of civic life: if excellence is trained and not god given, then do the gods exist as phenomena on their own, or are they a human construction? Is the Athenian state a product of divine ordinance or is it a construct of *nomos*? Is it natural and inevitable that some people will be superior to others and exert their power over them, or do controllable

¹⁵ Guthrie (1971) 36.

¹⁶ For more on the specific training offered by Sophists see Plato *Protagoras* 318e1; for Greek education in general, especially as it contrasts with Spartan education, see Xenophon *Constitution of the Spartans* II.1; also Kerferd (1981) 17.

circumstances create inequalities between people? The tragic stage provides an ideal space for considering these and other questions, and not surprisingly tragic playwrights often do so by considering opposing values of speech. For example, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* engages explicitly with the notion that one's *physis* can be controlled by words. Odysseus first persuades Neoptolemus to repress the part of his *physis* that finds deceit to be below his heroic station and then to adopt his own sophistic rationale that sees language as a tool designed specifically to control other people. However, as we shall see, Odysseus' strategy is unsuccessful because although words and the *nomoi* they represent are a powerful force, ultimately they are not strong enough to erode permanently the inherited noble qualities of Neoptolemus' *physis*.

In this play and several others, this study will identify and consider the presence of both explicit and implicit sophistic values and modes of speech that find voice on the lips of characters from Homeric epic. While any attempt to associate tragic language with any specific contemporary speaker runs the risk of being cursory at best, this study will take as one of its premises the notion that such sophistic modes and values of speech would be familiar to the audience members of any tragedy from their experience as participants in civic life. What it finds is a trend in Sophocles' and Euripides' depictions of sophistic speakers that moves from fairly inquisitive in its approach in the late 440s to more overtly hostile portrayals in the closing years of the Peloponnesian War. The character of Odysseus in particular, which from its epic tradition is already charged with a kind of heroism that relies upon rhetorical duplicity, moves from a moralizing figure who recognizes the disastrous consequences of unchecked sophistic persuasion in Sophocles' *Ajax*, to the kind of self-serving rogue who unapologetically employs his

rhetorical power for personal gain in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*. In his sole tragic appearance, Ajax too brings to the stage his stalwart Homeric persona as he stands as the final bastion of resistance to the sophistic rationale and practice that Odysseus is so eager to embrace. The rather conservative Ajax, however, is not able to maintain his grasp on the heroic world where he enjoyed so much success from his innate size and battle prowess, but he is overcome by a new context where men of less natural excellence can use speech to displace those gifted by nature from their rightful station.

This, then, is the nature of the fifth-century anxiety over speech in Athens that was generated from two causes: first by a system of government where the functionality of the state and the allocation of justice relied so heavily upon the rhetorical abilities of its citizen participants; and second by the emergence of a class of specially trained and rigorously practiced rhetorical stylists who through language could potentially hijack more political authority than the radical democracy could bear. Considering their position as radically progressive thinkers and exclusive trainers of elite rhetorical skills to the upper echelon of the Athenian citizen body, it perhaps comes as little surprise that the Sophists were treated at first with mistrust and eventually with open hostility. Amid this anxiety, the City Dionysia became an ideal space for the playwrights and audience members alike to explore the fallout when the mythological past and the traditions contained in it are forced up against the realities of their present world. To this end, heroes from the Homeric tradition are perfect figures for tragic re-imagination both because they are so fundamentally associated with the education of young citizens and their orientation into Athenian ideology, but also because as epic figures they bring to the

stage a wealth of fixed traditional characteristics that the playwrights are free to adapt for their own dramatic uses. Odysseus and Ajax are particularly well suited for this role: Ajax through his close association with the city of Athens and his contemporary heroic cult, and Odysseus through the close association between his heroism and his speech, rendering him something of a heroic predecessor to a craft in which Athenian citizens necessarily participate.

Part I: The Epic Odysseus

My exploration of the reception of the figure of Odysseus in the fifth—century dramatic texts begins with an examination of the epic figure of Odysseus. My discussion about specific characteristics of the later tragic Odysseus is founded upon the argument that Homer already presents a figure who in some key respects is oriented into a different heroic paradigm than other Iliadic heroes, such as Achilles. Although Odysseus is endowed with all the defining characteristics that one expects to find in an Achaean hero—noble birth, strength, martial skill, and affluence—he is excelled in each of these categories by one or more of his brothers-in-arms (the Atreidae, Ajax, Achilles, and Nestor).¹⁷ However, far from relegating Odysseus into the mass of ordinary and unremarkable soldiers in the Achaean host, Homer skillfully distinguishes Odysseus by adopting divergences from the heroic model epitomized by these figures. Gregory Nagy famously defines each of these heroic paradigms in terms of the end that it seeks; where *kleos* heroes such as Achilles, Diomedes, or Ajax fight in order to achieve “unwithering” fame, a *nostos* (homeward journey) hero such as Odysseus seeks rather to complete a journey and return to his home.¹⁸ As a result of his orientation into an alternative heroic paradigm, Odysseus is endowed with a slightly different skill set, in particular in terms of his unique rhetorical skills. These differences, and especially the emphasis on and proclivity for language and rhetorical artistry, as I will argue, form the basis of the figure of Odysseus as presented in later drama.

Odysseus’ first differentiation from the more common *kleos* hero is the distinct physical description of him offered by Helen and Priam from atop the walls of Troy:

¹⁷ Stanford (1954) 66.

¹⁸ Nagy (1979) 34-41.

Δεύτερον αὐτ' Ὀδυσῆα ἰδὼν ἐρέειν' ὁ γεραιός·
 εἴπ' ἄγε μοι καὶ τόνδε φίλον τέκος ὅς τις ὄδ' ἐστί·
 μείων μὲν κεφαλῇ Ἀγαμέμνωνος Ἀτρεΐδαο,
 εὐρύτερος δ' ὤμοισιν ἰδὲ στέρνοισιν ἰδέσθαι.
 τεύχεα μὲν οἱ κεῖται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ,
 αὐτὸς δὲ κτίλος ὡς ἐπιπωλεῖται στίχας ἀνδρῶν·
 ἀρνεῖω μιν ἔγωγε εἴσκω πηγεσιμάλλῳ,
 ὅς τ' οἴων μέγα πῶϋ διέρχεται ἀργεννάων.

Τὸν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειθ' Ἑλένη Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα·
 οὔτος δ' αὖ Λαερτιάδης πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς,
 ὃς τράφη ἐν δήμῳ Ἰθάκης κραναῆς περ ἐούσης
 εἰδῶς παντοίους τε δόλους καὶ μήδεα πυκνά.¹⁹

Then also seeing Odysseus aged (Priam) asked:
 “Now tell me, dear child, who this man is:
 He is smaller than Agamemnon, Atreus’ son, by a head,
 but appears broader in the shoulders and chest.
 His gear is lying on the fertile ground,
 and like a ram he is roaming the ranks of men:
 I deem him just like a thick—fleeced ram,
 who strides among a great flock of silvery sheep.”

And Helen, Zeus’ daughter, then replied:
 “This is Laertes’ son, clever Odysseus,
 who was raised in the mountainous land of Ithaca
 and he knows tricks of all kinds and shrewd strategies.”

(*Iliad* 3.191-202; all translations are my own)

Priam’s comparison of Odysseus to a ram, with his short but broad frame and “thick—fleeced” body hair, is quite striking; perhaps the tragedian Sophocles had this passage in mind when he stages Ajax’s mistaking of a sheep for Odysseus in the opening scene of the *Ajax* (101-13). It is important to note, however, that this figure does not strike Helen or Priam as ugly—at least by comparison to the unflattering description of Thersites at 2.212 or Dolon at 10.316—but rather as odd by comparison to the “tall, long limbered stature”²⁰ of other Achaean or Trojan heroes. Specifically, the contrast between Odysseus and Ajax’s enormous size and strength (*Il.* 3.229ff) will be discussed at length below.

¹⁹ All textual citations from the *Iliad* are from Allen (1931).

²⁰ Stanford (1954) 67. For a more detailed physical description and in particular his “large thighs, broad shoulders and chest, and strong arms” see *Od.* 18.67-9.

A second distinction that Homer generates in Odysseus is a curious interest in food and attention to his appetite.²¹ Once again, far from being a gluttonous or plebian characteristic, this point reflects a practical understanding of the pragmatic necessities of human life that has not been clouded by heroic passion. This point is acutely illustrated at *Iliad* 19.154-72. Achilles, simmering with bloodlust and now fully prepared to reenter combat, commands the Achaean troops to return with him to the front lines. But Odysseus objects, noting the soldiers' level of exhaustion after a night-long lament for Patroclus. To fight at its best, the body needs food and rest, and Odysseus successfully curbs Achilles' wrath by convincing him to lay aside his vengeance for one more day while the host refreshes itself. This pragmatism with respect to the physical needs of the body is a trait that surfaces at a variety of instances across Odysseus' entire literary and mythological tradition and will be of particular importance to his approach to problems and dealings with other characters in his dramatic depictions.

The third and by far most significant distinction Homer engenders in Odysseus is his ubiquitous use of clever speech. Epithets such as "wily" (πολύμητις) or "full of wise speech" (πολύαινος) are applied to Odysseus throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, suggesting both the level of skill and purpose for his clever rhetoric. This trait is in variance with the reproachful language used by Nestor (e.g. *Il.* 1.254-99), as well as the thoughtless, blustering, or naively-conceived outbursts of Agamemnon (e.g. *Il.* 2.119-151); moreover Odysseus' skill at speech stands in sharp contrast to the general reticence that is characteristic of the laconic Ajax (e.g. *Il.* 7.226-31) or indeed his wrathful silence (*Od.* 11.563, to be discussed at length below).

²¹ For recent work on Odysseus' hunger in both epic and satyr drama see Worman, (2002).

In fact, in the Homeric world there seems to be a strong connection between cleverness and eloquence, along with a notion that “the possession of speech...is often thought to entail the capacity for rational thinking as well.”²² To this end, it is important to recall not only Phoenix’s call to the warriors to be “both speakers of words and doers of deeds” (*Il.* 9.443), but also that Odysseus is not merely a gifted speaker among a tongue-tied host of soldiers, but the most adroit speaker among a category of heroes that consider speech a fundamental part of their mandate. Homer goes to great lengths to distinguish the exceptional rhetorical skill of Odysseus from the more ordinary skills of other heroes. Odysseus’ success as a rhetorician is due largely to the fact that he is endowed with a different and more diplomatic rhetorical style. Unencumbered by the fiery passion of Achilles that lends itself to venomous outbursts, or the convictions and prerogatives of Nestor that take a scolding tone, Odysseus speaks with great fluidity, grace, and attention to the reception of his words.²³ More than a set of speech acts, one gets the sense that Odysseus’ speeches are performances that are carefully calculated to soothe and persuade.²⁴ Odysseus is at his best at *Iliad* 2.295, where he stops the panic incited by Agamemnon’s ominous pessimism (2.110-41) and soothes the frenzied Achaeans:

ἡμῖν δ' εἵνατός ἐστι περιτροπέων ἐνιαυτὸς
 ἐνθάδε μιμνόντεσσι· τῷ οὐ νεμεσίζομ' Ἀχαιοὺς
 ἀσχαλάαν παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔμπης
 αἰσχρὸν τοι δηρὸν τε μένειν κενεὸν τε νέεσθαι.
 τλήτε φίλοι, καὶ μείνατ' ἐπὶ χρόνον ὄφρα δαῶμεν
 ἢ ἔτεδὸν Κάλχας μαντεύεται ἧε καὶ οὐκί.

...

²² Gera (2003) 182.

²³ See Martin (1989) 121-2 for the specific mechanics of Odysseus’ speeches, in which Martin identifies superfluous relative clauses as the primary mechanism by which Odysseus’ audience is lulled into a receptive state.

²⁴ See Bernardete (2005) 20 for the soothing speech of Odysseus, especially as it pertains to calming horses.

τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται.
 ἀλλ' ἄγε μίμνετε πάντες ἐϋκνήμιδες Ἄχαιοι
 αὐτοῦ εἰς ὃ κεν ἄστυ μέγα Πριάμοιο ἔλωμεν.

“For us remaining here the ninth year is passing:
 Thus I do not blame the Achaeans for
 growing restless by their curved ships: but still,
 it is a disgrace to remain here so long and depart empty-handed.
 Bear up friends, and wait until we learn
 whether Calchas prophesized truly or not.

...
 So far all his (prophecies) are coming true.
 So come! Stand fast well-greaved Achaeans
 until we capture Priam’s great city!”

(*Iliad* 2.295-300, 330-2)

The Achaean troops “approve” enthusiastically of this speech (μῦθον ἐπαινήσαντες, 2.335) specifically because it differs so strikingly from Agamemnon’s in tone and disposition, and because it strikes the chord Odysseus knows his audience longs to hear. Though both speakers make note of the grueling nine years that the war has already consumed (2.134 and 2.295), the hopelessness reflected in Agamemnon’s words is dissolved by Odysseus’ recollection of the prophecy that the city will fall in the tenth year. That is, as Odysseus asserts, nine exhausting and arduous years have passed because they are *supposed* to have passed.

Perhaps the most famous and poignant instance of Odysseus’ speech in the *Iliad* comes in book 9 where the embassy of Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax attempts to persuade Achilles to accept Agamemnon’s reparations and reenter the war. Although the ambassadors are ultimately unsuccessful, Odysseus once again demonstrates a keen sense of the way his words will be received by his audience. In this scene he proves his diplomatic prowess not only by what he says, but also by what he leaves unsaid. After Agamemnon becomes convinced that his feud with Achilles must be ended at any cost, he lists the many prizes that he will give to cool Achilles’ rage: tripods, gold, horses

(9.122), Lesbian women (128), his promise that he never laid with Briseis (131), a ship brimming with gold and twenty beautiful Trojan women (137), marriage to one of his remaining daughters (146), and command of seven populous cities in Argos (149).

However, haughty even in defeat, Agamemnon cannot resist a parting shot:

ταῦτά κέ οἱ τελέσαιμι μεταλήξαντι χόλοιο.
 δηθήτω Ἄϊδος τοι ἀμείλιχος ἠδ' ἀδάμαστος,
 τούνεκα καί τε βροτοῖσι θεῶν ἔχθιστος ἀπάντων·
 καί μοι ὑποστήτω ὅσον βασιλεύτερός εἰμι
 ἠδ' ὅσον γενεῇ προγενέστερος εὔχομαι εἶναι.

All these things I shall grant to him if he will give up his grudge.
 He should yield: Hades is implacable and inflexible,
 and so he is the most hateful of the gods to all mortals.
 Let him submit to me since I am more regal
 and I can claim to be elder among our people.

(*Iliad* 9.157-61)

Odysseus senses that Agamemnon's offer and especially his final snub may do more harm than good, and so he chooses to tweak the message's content and tone before delivering it to Achilles.²⁵ Fearing that this final insult may be enough to eliminate any chance that Achilles will ever return to combat, he removes Agamemnon's affront entirely.²⁶ Moreover, Odysseus also recognizes that Agamemnon's offer fails to address the things that will be most effective in persuading Achilles: the martial success of Hector in his absence and the inevitable destruction of the Greek force without his intervention. Rather than a simple list of material prizes that will be bestowed upon Achilles in exchange for his return, Odysseus constructs his exhortation with a beautiful ring composition that addresses all of these points. Ring composition is a narrative strategy touches upon a series of related topics until it comes to the main point of the speech, and

²⁵ Martin (1989) 64.

²⁶ Nagy (1979) 51-3.

then retraces the steps of the narrative up to that point in reverse order.²⁷ Here, Odysseus begins with the incredible success that Hector enjoys without Achilles to oppose him (9.237), reminds Achilles that Peleus advised him to win the honor of the Greeks by keeping his proud heart in check (253), lists the awards that Agamemnon offers sans insult (264), notes that upon his return the Achaean force will honor him “like a god” (302), and concludes where he began— by reminding him that Hector remains on the battlefield mocking his absence (304).

As noted above, this speech is unsuccessful in achieving the immediate aim of the embassy. Nonetheless, in giving such close attention not only to his speech but also to the effects that his words will have upon his listener, Odysseus displays an understanding of the complete process of communication, of which the speech act is merely the genesis. That is, to excel as a rhetorician a hero must be more than a “speaker of words”— he must be a *craft*er of speeches, one who can anticipate the needs of his listener. In comparison to Agamemnon’s ill-conceived and oafish words, Odysseus is able to accomplish ends with his careful words that, in a narrative brimming with violence and physical action, grant him an often subtle but essential heroism that becomes indispensable to Greek victory.

As the Homeric narrative moves from the panoramic clashes of the *Iliad* to the more personal and individual conflicts of the *Odyssey*, the particular or distinctive heroism of Odysseus’ talent for speech is drawn into sharper focus and his role in the narrative undergoes a significant transition. Where he was perhaps not as central as an atypical hero in the martial milieu of the *Iliad*— especially with reference to his emphasis on the strategic use of speech— the *Odyssey* showcases his rhetorical skill as fundamental

²⁷ Douglas (2007) 31.

to his heroism. Throughout the poem Odysseus finds himself in situations where speech is an ideal tool for navigating the delicate circumstances toward the best possible outcome for him, situations where violence, pride, and strict ideology are not viable options and where less masterfully speaking heroes surely would have faltered. In fact, the majority of Odysseus' overseas adventures are narrated by the hero himself in a carefully constructed flashback narrative (books 9-12) to the Phaeacians, from whom he hopes to procure safe passage home to Ithaca. At this point, in a very real sense, Odysseus—having lived, absorbed, and inwardly transmuted his experiences—takes the narrative reins from Homer and reveals more of himself than at any other locus of Homeric epic.²⁸ A common thread that runs through these many adventures is a reliance upon and survival by the very thing that defines Odysseus' heroism: cleverness and clear-mindedness, and each with speech as its medium.

One of Odysseus' most famous speech acts, as recounted in the flashback section, occurs during his encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus in book 9 of the *Odyssey*, where he procures safe passage for himself and his men by inventing a false name for himself—a stratagem that would be unthinkable for a more traditional epic hero such as Achilles. But far more than a simple piece of guile that dupes the witless Cyclops, Odysseus' *outis* (no one) pun is successful specifically because of his heroic capacity for speech. The dramatic gravity of Odysseus' miscalculation in his reliance on the customs of *xenia* (guest friendship) becomes clear in the wake of the initial shock he feels when Polyphemus scoffs at his appeal for the aid due to guests and his invocation of Ζεὺς ἐπιτιμῆτωρ.²⁹ Odysseus' response is uncharacteristically passionate; but as he is about to

²⁸ Minchin (2007) 265-9.

²⁹ Segal (1994) 95.

drive his sword into the sleeping Cyclops' torso, the plan and the pun dawn on him as his *sophrosune* (clear thinking) returns. As Odysseus' plan unfolds and the genius of it is revealed, it becomes clear that it only succeeds because Odysseus recognizes Polyphemus' underdeveloped conception of speech. Polyphemus' failure to understand that words can and often do have multiple dimensions and semantic fields underscores Odysseus' heroic use of speech that is here more than anywhere else contingent upon his keen sense of the way his words will be heard.³⁰

Odysseus' victory is short-lived. In a temporary but calamitous loss of self-control Odysseus indulges in a reckless self-importance that a keen reader of epic might more expect from Achilles:

ὦς φάσαν, ἀλλ' οὐ πείθον ἐμὸν μεγάλῃτορα θυμόν,
 ἀλλὰ μιν ἄψορρον προσέφην κεκοτηότι θυμῷ·
 Ἰκύκλωψ, αἶ κέν τις σε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων
 ὀφθαλμοῦ εἴρηται ἀεικελίην ἀλαωτύν,
 φάσθαι Ὀδυσσεῖα πτολιπόρθιον ἐξαλαῶσαι,
 υἱὸν Λαέρτεω, Ἰθάκῃ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ ἔχοντα.³¹

Thus they (Odysseus' men) spoke, but my great heart did not obey,
 and so I spoke back to him with my soul enraged:
 "Cyclops, if ever some mortal man should ask you
 about the wretched blinding of your eye,
 say that Odysseus the sacker of cities blinded (you),
 the son of Laertes, whose home is Ithaca."

(*Odyssey* 9.500-5)

This is perhaps the one instance in the epic of Odysseus' misuse of speech, and this single lapse into *hubris* gives rise to the many trials he will face over the course of the next several books. However, his marked error at this early point in the narrative flashback draws into sharper focus his more prudent use of and craving to hear speech in later episodes.

³⁰ Podlecki (1961) 128-32, Brown (1966) 194; Segal (1994) 96-101.

³¹ All textual citations from the *Odyssey* are from Mühl (1962).

If Odysseus' greatest failure as a speaker is his parting shot to Polyphemus, his greatest success resides in his entire narrative to the Phaeacians.³² Indeed, in describing the Phaeacians' reaction to the tale of Odysseus, Homer uses almost a mystical language to describe the inherently charming or seductive nature of speech:

ὡς ἔφαθ', οἱ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἀκὴν ἐγένοντο σιωπῆ,
κηληθμῶ δ' ἔσχοντο κατὰ μέγαρα σκίοεντα.

Thus he (Odysseus) spoke, and all (the Phaeacians) fell hushed in silence,
held spellbound in the shadowy room.

(*Odyssey* 11.333-4)

This notion that words can somehow take on a magical or pharmaceutical property and control the thoughts of their targets becomes a popular motif among fifth century writers.³³ It is no accident that Odysseus' recounting of his journey to Hades in book 11 inspires such a reaction from his audience. Perhaps most significant in his description of this encounter is Odysseus' sacrifice of the ram and the pool of its blood that not only allows communication between the living and the dead, but also guarantees that no lies or at least "straight words" (νημερτές)³⁴ will be spoken:

ὡς ἐφάμην, ὁ δέ μ' αὐτίκ' ἀμειβόμενος προσέειπε·
ῥηϊδίον τοι ἔπος ἐρέω καὶ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θήσω·
ὄν τινα μὲν κεν ἔῃς νεκρῶν κατατεθνηώτων
αἵματος ἄσσον ἴμεν, ὁ δέ τοι νημερτὲς ἐνίψει·
ὦ δέ κ' ἐπιφθονέης, ὁ δέ τοι πάλιν εἴσιν ὀπίσσω!

Thus I spoke, and he (Tiresias) immediately addressed me in reply:
"I will tell and place an easy word in your heart:
Whoever of the dead shades you allow to come
near the blood will speak truth to you.
And to whom you would deny (it), he will go back again."

(*Odyssey* 11.145-8)

³² Segal (1994) 61-4, 122; Griffin (2004) 161; Minchin (2007) 266.

³³ See especially Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* 10 & 14, to be discussed below.

³⁴ Literally "not missing the mark"; for a similar use, see Hesiod's *Hymn to Apollo* 131-3.

Such a guarantee releases Odysseus from any necessity for guile or trickiness, a factor that sets each of his encounters with the shades apart from all of Odysseus' other speeches.³⁵ The result is something of an unfamiliar role for Odysseus in the act of communication—here, he is the recipient of information rather than the dispenser of it. This relinquishing of control over speech once again emphasizes Odysseus' awareness of the entire process of communication beyond the simple speech act that initiates it, perhaps the most important and consistent characteristic that is employed by later dramatists.³⁶ In portraying himself in this passive role of seeker of information and listener, Odysseus quite subtly disarms and mollifies the sympathies of any of the Phaeacians that are perhaps hearing his tale with skepticism. This awareness of the complete arc of communication that exists between speakers and hearers is taken to its extreme when Odysseus encounters the shade of Ajax, who in his silence is the only listener— or, perhaps, silent speaker³⁷ — with whom Odysseus' speech fails completely.

A final instance that reveals Odysseus' strong preoccupation with, and even curiosity about and vulnerability to the power of speech, is his famous near-encounter with the Sirens in book 12. This episode seems to gesture toward one of Odysseus' more infrequently emphasized characteristics— an intellectual curiosity that the witch Circe recognizes as she orders that he be bound to the mast and his companions' ears filled with wax.³⁸ The Sirens' song, the voice of their speech, is once again described as having the capacity to alter or enchant the mind (θέλγουσι 12.40; λιγυρῆ θέλγουσι ἀοιδῆ 12.44), and is dangerous specifically because it is so “clear sounding” and “honey-voiced”

³⁵ Segal (1994) 90.

³⁶ See Pelling (2008) 85, who discusses this process and the various ways that tragedians subvert it.

³⁷ See below for the silent speech of Ajax, both in this encounter and in Sophocles' tragedy.

³⁸ Stanford (1954) 77.

(μελιγῆρος 12.187).³⁹ Most significant, though, is the song itself with which the Sirens entice Odysseus. Just like Odysseus himself, it would seem that the Sirens can sense the proclivities of their victims and tailor their speech to be as seductive as possible:

δεῦρ' ἄγ' ἰών, πολύαιν' Ὀδυσσεῦ, μέγα κῦδος Ἀχαιῶν,
 νῆα κατάστησον, ἵνα νωϊτέρην ὄπ' ἀκούσῃς.
 οὐ γάρ πώ τις τῆδε παρήλασε νηϊ μελαίνῃ,
 πρὶν γ' ἡμέων μελίγηρυν ἀπὸ στομάτων ὄπ' ἀκούσαι,
 ἀλλ' ὅ γε τερψάμενος νεῖται καὶ πλείονα εἰδώς.
 ἴδμεν γάρ τοι πάνθ', ὅσ' ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ
 Ἄργεῖοι Τρῳῆς τε θεῶν ἰότητι μόγησαν,
 ἴδμεν δ' ὅσα γένηται ἐπὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ.

Come hither, Odysseus, full of wise speech, great glory of the Achaeans,
 stop your ship so that you may hear our voices.
 For no one ever yet sailed by on a dark ship,
 at least before he heard the honeyed voice of our lips,
 and he sails on rejoicing and knowing more.
 For we know everything, how much in broad Troy
 the Greeks and Trojans suffered by the will of the gods,
 and we know how many things happen on the fertile earth.

(*Odyssey* 12.184-91)

By first flattering Odysseus' as a speaker himself (πολυαῖνος)⁴⁰ and then promising to sing the song of his own glory on their honeyed lips, the Sirens have zeroed in upon Odysseus' most pronounced heroic trait and, in a startling and potentially lethal inversion, attempted to turn it against him. Beyond the aesthetic quality of the Sirens' song, the promise of indulging in speech with such supernaturally eloquent creatures must be equally tempting to him. The Sirens, with their disastrously seductive powers of utterance, may well represent Odysseus' own power taken to a monstrous extreme.

In addition to these episodes there is another aspect to Odysseus' speech that plays a crucial role in his successful return home—the restrained use of speech that allows the hero to hold his tongue when necessary. In his parting shot to Polyphemus

³⁹ Buxton (1982) 51; Segal (1994) 100-1.

⁴⁰ For Odysseus' (perhaps counterintuitive) stratagem of persistently underscoring his rhetorical skill as an attempt to lend authenticity to his narrative to the Phaeacians, see Pucci (1998) 132.

discussed above, it is particularly noteworthy that this rash insult stems from a momentary loss of control over his heart (*thumos*) (9.500), the very element that Tiresias tells Odysseus that he must suppress in order to complete his journey (11.103). For Odysseus, the restraint of the *thumos* is intimately tied to the use of speech. In fact, it is this very heroic and enduring silence that completes his beggar disguise and allows him to reestablish himself as lord of his house and of Ithaca. As shall be discussed below, it would seem that silence, like speech, when properly employed has the power to move and persuade an audience.

As we have seen, the epic Odysseus is distinctive in his heroism by virtue of both his adept speech and sensitivity to the reception of his words by his audience. Speech is the ideal tool of the truly adaptable hero because it possesses enough dexterity to bring pleasure, pain, or both simultaneously as each situation demands. Where the Iliadic Odysseus is granted limited but instrumental opportunities to put his particular rhetorical skill set to use, in the *Odyssey* he survives and is ultimately victorious specifically because he is able and clever enough to use speech and calculated silence to their greatest potential. However, it is this adaptability—what may be seen as a subversive heroism—that becomes the axis upon which fifth—century tragic playwrights spin his character in a more sinister direction. In the political atmosphere of the fifth century, where speech wielded such enormous power and was therefore held in such great distrust, Odysseus and his wiles devolve from heroic to something more nefarious.

Part II: The Tragic Odysseus

As the fifth century unfolds in Athens, and as the enormous power that speech wields in Athenian law courts and before the assembly becomes a topic of increasingly rigorous discussion, the figure of Odysseus comes to represent, on the tragic stage, both the dynamism and dangers that unchecked speech can possess. His flattering Homeric epithet *polytropos* (very clever) becomes closely associated with the sophistic practice of making the worse argument better and the better argument worse.⁴¹ These representations of Odysseus and his use of language carry a dense political charge that is heightened by the dialectic created in the overlap between his lingering Homeric heroism and the political culture of the audience at the City Dionysia.⁴² Indeed, as this dialectic grows more poignant— and as the practice of sophism becomes more conspicuous amid the increasingly poor conditions in Athens during the later years of the Peloponnesian War⁴³— Odysseus as a figure in tragedy is treated as an increasingly vile character. The sharp-witted and pragmatic Odysseus of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* becomes a menacing presence that haunts the stage of Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Troades*, and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*.⁴⁴ However, not all representations of Odysseus can be read as entirely negative. In particular, the Odysseus of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* underscores the more complicated relationship that exists between speech, persuasive speakers, and the audiences that are their target.

⁴¹ Sipiora (2002) 25.

⁴² Heske (2007) 74.

⁴³ Buxton (1982) 24.

⁴⁴ Fragments of Aeschylean satyr plays that feature Odysseus have him suffering strange humiliations: for example, a chamber pot is dumped over him in *The Bone Gatherers* and he dies by sepsis from eating heron feces in *The Ghost Raisers*, perhaps in the process transforming his “honey-sweet” words into ones quite a bit less alluring. See Stanford (1954) 103.

Perspective and Controlled Rhetoric in Sophocles' *Ajax*

The figure of Odysseus plays a prominent role in Sophocles' *Ajax*, a play most scholars locate among the earlier works of his career.⁴⁵ As will be discussed at greater length in my section on the figure of Ajax, this play consists of an intriguing set of plot and character inversions, in which the relative and changing values of *logos* (word) and *ergon* (deed) are explored. On the surface level the play engages with the inherent dangers of over- or under-indulging in speech, but it also probes the complexities of a scenario where speech is the only solution to a crisis that language has created. If Odysseus and his proclivity for wily speech commit any infractions in Sophocles' *Ajax*, the offense occurs before the opening of the action on stage. Odysseus, although he has been defeated in the contest for the arms of Achilles and thereby heir to the title of "Best of the Achaeans," persuades a jury that he is in fact the victor. Ajax's wrath at this slight is curbed by Athena and the divine madness with which she clouds his senses, and instead of slaughtering the Greek leadership he falls upon a herd of cows and sheep.

As the play opens we learn that Ajax holds in his tent and plans to torture an animal he thinks is Odysseus.⁴⁶ However, far from exultant at the continued humiliation of his opponent in the contest, Odysseus is compassionate and uncharacteristically terse at the discovery of the bizarre slaughter that his persuasive speech has indirectly—at least to his mind—caused:

ΑΘ: Ὀρᾶς, Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχὺν ὄση;
 Τούτου τίς ἄν σοι τάνδρὸς ἢ προνοούστερος
 ἢ δρᾶν ἀμείνων ἠύρέθη τὰ καίρια;
 ΟΔ. Ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν' οἶδ' ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν
 δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ,

⁴⁵ See Reinhardt (1979) 1-8 for evidence that the *Ajax* is Sophocles' second-earliest play, after his *Antigone*, perhaps dating as early as the 440s.

⁴⁶ There is perhaps a touch of dark comedy in Ajax's confusion, considering Priam's comparison of Odysseus to a ram at *Iliad* 3.197.

ὀθοῦνεκ' ἄτη συγκατέζευκται κακῇ,
 οὐδὲν τὸ τοῦτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦμὸν σκοπῶν.
 Ὅρῳ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν
 εἶδωλ', ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν, ἢ κούφην σκιάν.⁴⁷

Athena: Do you see, Odysseus, how great is the power of the gods?
 Who could have been found either more prudent
 than this man, or to do more good with excellent timing?

Odysseus: I know none. And I take pity on him
 in his misery, though he is my enemy,
 because he was yoked to wicked ruin.
 I consider my own my fate no greater than his.
 For I see that we are nothing but phantoms,
 though we may yet live, or empty shadows.

(*Ajax* 121-126)

Odysseus' modest and reluctant response, and especially the ephemerality that he notes as the lot of all men, stand in sharp contrast to Athena's gloating. As Ruth Scodel aptly observes, the spectacle that Athena has revealed and Odysseus' sympathetic reaction places the audience "almost, but not exactly, in the position of Odysseus (since we see him along with the others), and in seeing the characters see Ajax we are drawn into the play's play with point of view."⁴⁸ This notion that Sophocles so closely and intentionally, we must presume, aligns the sympathies of the viewing audience with the masterfully speaking Odysseus in a play that is fundamentally concerned with speech has two important implications.

First, it allows the play to unfold as a series of performances. Odysseus, made invisible by Athena's divine power (83),⁴⁹ is an observer when Ajax appears on the stage (91) and thereby he plays the role that tragic performance typically assigns to its viewing audience. That is, as spectator to the "play's play," Odysseus is granted exclusive access to Ajax's mind and can be affected by it on an emotional level that inspires sympathies

⁴⁷ All textual citations from the *Ajax* are from Dain (1958) volume 2.

⁴⁸ Scodel (2008) 245. See also Goldhill (1986) 181, and Blundell (1989) 62.

⁴⁹ Segal (1986) 83 makes the sharp observation that Athena clouds Ajax's eyes with divine power in very much the same way that Odysseus affects the minds of his audiences with persuasive speech.

typically unavailable to tragic characters (or, perhaps only available to the chorus). This access has a profound effect on Odysseus, described most astutely by Simon Goldhill:

It is the subordination of the tricky, deceptive side of Odysseus' rhetoric to his view of the moral hesitation which comes from the mutability of things that marks the specific rewriting of the most developed figure of epic in Sophocles' tragedy. Odysseus' recognition of the relativism or shifting of moral and personal relations is not only set in contrast to the stubborn unchangeability of Ajax and to the naive 'certainties' of Teucer and the Atreids, but also must be seen in terms of the heroic persona, the master of shifting disguises, of which he necessarily is the heir.⁵⁰

This “subordination” of Odysseus' more deceitful or amoral qualities is what makes his role in the outcome of the play—the agent in the restoration of at least part of Ajax's *kleos*—possible. The privileged perspective over the entirety of Ajax's tragedy allows him to view the individual merits and limitations of the speech of each of the litigants that wrangle over the fallen hero's corpse, as opposed to being relegated into the position of another contributor to an irreconcilable situation.⁵¹ Ultimately, it is this privileged perspective that makes compromise possible.

The second implication of Odysseus' dual role as both participant in and audience to Ajax's tragedy is a direct result of this more existential perspective. The semi-removal of Odysseus from the action of the performance gives his reappearance amid the tense *agon* between Teucer and the Atreidae an almost *deus ex machina* quality, and allows him to resolve the rancorous situation that his persuasive speech has created, ironically and somewhat pointedly, by means of rhetoric. Odysseus begins (1328) with an appeal that Agamemnon allow truth to be spoken and aid to be exchanged between friends (*philoï*). When Agamemnon reciprocates and acknowledges Odysseus as his “greatest

⁵⁰ Goldhill (1986) 159.

⁵¹ Pelling (2008) 95. See also Cairns (2008) 318 in the same volume.

friend in the army” (1331), the rhetorical trap is set. Quite tactfully, Odysseus is successful in persuading Agamemnon by trapping him within his own language, and by specifically unpacking the treatments that are due to one’s *philoï*. By his own example, says Odysseus (1336), Agamemnon should see that though he may hate Ajax, the dead hero was his friend, at least within the boundaries of the “helping friends and harming enemies” axiom investigated most thoroughly by Mary Whitlock Blundell,⁵² and thus worthy of the respect due to friends (1342). Odysseus claims that he hated Ajax as much as he could without violating obligations that exist between *philoï* (1347), and that Agamemnon should do the same. If he should do otherwise he would not wreak his vengeance upon Ajax, but rather he would “attack the laws of the gods” (1343). Most importantly, in his closing Odysseus is careful to demonstrate that *philia* goes far beyond a simple bond of loyalty that unites men with a common goal, because it is in fact predicated upon the willingness of *philoï* to yield to and be persuaded by another who has their best interest at heart. That is, true *philia* is predicated upon an open and equal line of communication between friends that relies upon honesty (1328), willingness to yield to a friend (1353), and shared honor based on *philia* alone and without the expectation of a favor in return.⁵³

The morality and obligation that exists between speakers and listeners is a subject that Sophocles explores with even greater scrutiny in the *Philoctetes*; but in this passage in the *Ajax*, Odysseus is shown to erode Agamemnon’s excessively authoritarian demand for obedience by appealing to the bonds of *philia* that makes the acquiescence he seeks possible, or at least worth pursuing. It would be difficult to imagine so egalitarian a

⁵² Blundell (1989) 26-49. See also Dover (1974) 180-4.

⁵³ Blundell (1989) 95-6, 101 notes that these qualities are absent in Ajax’s treatment of his *philoï*, which will be discussed below. See also Easterling (1993) 13.

notion in the mind of Odysseus as he was speaking to persuade a jury to award him the arms of Achilles in the crucial episode that occurs before the opening of the play. Indeed, when he now advises that Agamemnon “not delight in gains that corrupt honor” (1349), Odysseus could just as easily be speaking to himself.

Tragedy is rarely, or perhaps even impossibly, concerned with reconciliation or adequately timed moral epiphany. However, the Odysseus of the *Ajax* who asks to aid in the burial of the fallen hero and is denied the privilege has clearly experienced some change from the one who cheated Ajax of the arms of Achilles. Indeed, the observation of the devastating force created in the collisions between inflexible heroes and the ideology by which they define themselves makes Odysseus a more capable and effective speaker.⁵⁴ As we have seen, it is precisely this perspective that allows Odysseus to dissolve the impasse that threatens to implode the Greek force by manipulating the language of obligation and by interrelating and reexamining terms such as “good,” “noble,” “friend,” and “enemy.”⁵⁵ Odysseus’ ever-increasing aptitude for controlled rhetoric is, paradoxically, the greatest beneficiary of its own crisis.

At this early point in his career it is not surprising that Sophocles stages Odysseus in this particular light. The hero’s calculated and effective speech in the *Ajax* is reminiscent of those moments in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* where Odysseus is at his very best.⁵⁶ At this early point both in the theatrical career of Sophocles and in the civic discussion on the power and utility of sophistic speech, Odysseus retains much of his epic heroism. Indeed, through Odysseus’ increased awareness over the course of the *Ajax* concerning the implications of his rhetorical power, we might detect the kind of

⁵⁴ Knox (1964) 122 calls this compassionate and eloquent Odysseus a “democratic ideal.”

⁵⁵ Goldhill (1986) 158.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, his soothing speech to the panicked Achaeans at *Iliad* 2.295ff.

“thinking-through” of problematic values that some scholars have identified as unique to (especially later) Sophoclean drama.⁵⁷ However, in his next representation of Odysseus—much later in his career, after the full implications of the sophistic movement have been revealed, and perhaps even under the influence a kind of “cross reception” with his competitor Euripides—Sophocles is significantly less kind to the hero.

Odysseus, Neoptolemus, and Persuasive Communities in the *Philoctetes*

If the appearance of Odysseus in Sophocles’ *Ajax* leaves the impression of a grifter who gains a greater degree of self-awareness or a peerless persuader who recognizes the need for restrictions upon a system where words can supersede deeds, his next appearance in Sophoclean drama is much less favorable. The *Philoctetes* is one of the few plays that can be securely dated and was first performed in 409 BC, just two years after Pisander’s carefully calculated pitch to the Athenian assembly produced real, tangible constitutional change. At no other period in the fifth century is the power of speech and sophistry more apparent than in the wake of the short-lived but bloody oligarchic coup of 411.⁵⁸

In light of this, it is not surprising that Sophocles stages the Odysseus of the *Philoctetes* with more overtly sophistic overtones than were apparent in the *Ajax*, especially following the hostile portrayals of Euripides to be discussed below. Significantly, Odysseus assumes the two occupations for which sophists are most intensely criticized and that hold the greatest influence over the civic sphere. First, Odysseus plays the part of educator to a young and (at least partially) impressionable

⁵⁷ Rose (1992) 278-82, 327-30.

⁵⁸ See Thucydides 8.53-4, 97-8.

Neoptolemus and engages specifically with the *physis/nomos* conflict explored by the sophist Antiphon.⁵⁹ Next, Odysseus is rendered with distinctly sophistic ethical views concerning both the role that speech can and should play in the political and legal realms (*Philoctetes* 96-99) as well as the necessary dichotomy speech creates between speakers and listeners. Of critical importance is Sophocles' attitude toward this disunity in his staging of Odysseus, as the discord that arises between speakers and listeners of unequal social and political standing in the *Philoctetes* seems to confront its audience directly on the stakes and consequences of these issues.

Scholars often characterize Odysseus as a wicked or at least unscrupulous figure in the *Philoctetes*, one who will complete his task without regard to who or what is destroyed in the process.⁶⁰ This criticism is certainly not without merit. However, a more compelling critical perspective views the play as a competition between “persuasive communities,”⁶¹ groups of speakers and listeners that operate under a system of shared values and ideologies concerning the proper and fair use of persuasive speech. In the dramatic model of the *Philoctetes*, both Odysseus and Philoctetes have a goal that they hope to achieve through persuasion (to retrieve the bow and to be evacuated from the island, respectively), and over the course of the play each employs this persuasion within the ideological boundaries of the persuasive community that he represents. On one side, Odysseus is representative of a persuasive community that views speech as a tool that can and should be employed for the benefit of the greatest number of community members as possible, even at the cost of objectifying members of that same community. Conversely, Philoctetes and (eventually) Neoptolemus reject the notion that speech is an instrument

⁵⁹ *On Truth* fr. 44B; see also Gagarin (2002) 65-8.

⁶⁰ Stanford (1954) 108; Goldhill (1986) 169.

⁶¹ White (1985) 8.

by which one person can control another. Rather, it is a medium that is useful in creating and maintaining stability in a community under pressure from outside forces. The exploration of these two persuasive communities and the conflicts that arise when their boundaries come into contact unfold over the course of Sophocles' dramatic narrative, and in doing so they reflect two extreme views of the role that speech plays in the public life of Athenian citizens.

The Odysseus of the *Philoctetes* in particular embodies a kind of duality created by his Homeric persona, a hero who has achieved his status and engages with enemies and friends by means that are less typically heroic. On the one hand he certainly “represents the worst products of the fifth-century sophistic movement—the quibbling, unscrupulous, corrupt, ambitious, self-seeking sophist, rejoicing...to corrupt the youth of Athens with his insidious arts.”⁶² This is, no doubt, the kind of figure that would have been familiar to any Athenian citizen that actively participated in public life in 409 BC. However, from a different and perhaps broader perspective, Odysseus' conduct in the *Philoctetes* can be read as justifiable action taken for the greater benefit of the Achaean war effort. The bow of Heracles and Philoctetes himself are, according to the prophecy of Helenus,⁶³ prerequisites to a Greek victory over Troy. Odysseus is selected to retrieve them both, perhaps, because of his heroic adaptability and willingness to abandon certain heroic mandates. That is, a man who is willing to do anything to accomplish his task is the perfect candidate for a task that absolutely must be completed.

⁶² Stanford (1954) 110; see also Knox (1964) 125.

⁶³ While many critics have noted a stark inconsistency and illogicality between Odysseus' plan and the terms of the prophecy (that the bow *and* Philoctetes himself must come to Troy), most follow Wilamowitz in allowing Sophocles a certain amount of “dramatic convenience.” See Knox (1964) 187-90 n. 21; Vernant (1988) 165; Blundell (1989) 184 n. 2; and Scodel (2008) 249.

Near the outset of his task, Odysseus invokes Hermes and Athena Nike and asks them to smile upon his endeavor: “And may we be guided by Hermes, god of deception/ Who gives safe conduct, and by my constant patron/ Athena, guardian of cities, whose name is Victory” (133-4). While this pair of divinities in the specific incarnations invoked by Odysseus may seem at first oddly matched, their combination expresses Odysseus’ pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy perfectly. That is, the guile that is favored by Hermes, though inherently un-heroic, is a tool that can justifiably be used to complete a task that is endorsed by Athena Nike, protector of cities—or in this case, the Achaean host and by extension Greek civilization as a whole. This reveals, as Martha Nussbaum notes, “a man who accords ultimate value to states of affairs, and specifically to the state of affairs which seems to represent the greatest possible good for all citizens.”⁶⁴ Odysseus rejects the notion that certain actions that promote the welfare of one’s countrymen or do harm to one’s enemies should not be undertaken on principle. Indeed, one of the most significant questions with which the *Philoctetes* wrestles is how this notion, in spite of its initial attractiveness, can be so inherently defective. What is the value of even the most basic ideals that make the functioning *polis* possible, such as good faith, friendship, and justice to such a utilitarian philosophy?

The obvious foil to Odysseus and the “men-as-means” rationality described by James Boyd White⁶⁵ is Neoptolemus. As the young son of the deceased Achilles, Neoptolemus is the natural beneficiary of the “best of the Achaeans” ethos and comes to represent a naive understanding of the heroic paradigm his father epitomized. At its most basic level this heroic paradigm requires a stalwart resolve and an absolute adherence to a

⁶⁴ Nussbaum (1976) 30. See also Blundell (1989) 188.

⁶⁵ White (1985) 8.

chosen set of values. This resolve, however, comes under constant emotional attack⁶⁶ and “to the rest of the world, the hero’s angry, stubborn temper seems thoughtless and ill-counseled.”⁶⁷ Having recently entered into the heroic world after Achilles’ death, Neoptolemus is charged with the same responsibility that was a source of such contention for his father: to serve the public interest without compromising the dignity worthy of the heroic position.

It is precisely this tension between Neoptolemus’ desire to benefit the Achaean host and the heroic philosophical inflexibility that Odysseus targets in his opening speech, and he is successful due largely in part to Neoptolemus’ naïveté. As we shall see, central to this persuasion is an appeal to what is *γενναίος*, “suitable to one’s birth” or “adherent to one’s nature.” In fact, one might even fairly say that conceptions of *γενναίος* set the boundaries between the communities that Odysseus and Neoptolemus represent. Odysseus uses this very term as he opens his endeavor to persuade Neoptolemus that the only way they will succeed in their task to retrieve Philoctetes and the bow of Heracles is through deceit: “Child of Achilles, you must be *γενναίος* concerning the purpose for which you came here” (50-51). There is a subtle and artfully rendered division between the two elements of this term, and at once we see the sleight of hand that Odysseus is attempting: he is asking Neoptolemus to engage with the part of *γενναίος* that responds to his role as an aristocrat and calls on him to serve the public good, but he is also going to ask him to repress temporarily the part that requires him to adhere to his nature, and to make use of the ethical escape route that they are working

⁶⁶ One thinks of Tecmessa’s moving but ineffective pleas to Ajax (*Ajax* 588) or Achilles’ admission that he is moved by the words of Agamemnon’s ambassadors (and Ajax in particular) but remains unwilling to fight (*Iliad* 9.644-8).

⁶⁷ Knox (1964) 21.

under orders.⁶⁸ For the community that Odysseus represents, then, real γενναίος involves conforming to “situational, not internal, requirements.”⁶⁹ If base actions provide a great benefit to the body one serves, these actions cannot be condemned.

Odysseus, ever cognizant of how his words will be received, asks Neoptolemus to consider what is at stake in their project and weigh the tremendous prizes that can be won by deceit, as ignoble as that stratagem may seem to him:

Ἔξοιδα καὶ φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα
 τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακά·
 ἀλλ’ ἡδὺν γάρ τοι κτήμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν.
 τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ’ αὖθις ἐκφανοῦμεθα·
 νῦν δ’ εἰς ἀναιδῆς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ
 δός μοι σεαυτόν, κᾶτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον
 κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν.⁷⁰

I know it is not part of your nature
 to tell untruths or resort to evil.
 But to gain victory is a pleasant achievement.
 Bring yourself to do it. We shall prove our honesty later on.
 Now, for a short time, in shame give
 yourself over to me. Then, for the rest of time,
 be called the most god-fearing of all mortals.

(*Philoctetes* 79-85)

Neoptolemus’ reaction to this exhortation is hostile specifically because it opposes what he considers to be γενναίος. That is, “he *is* a certain kind of person, in part by his birth, and it is his sense of who he is that will be his ethical guide.”⁷¹ Neoptolemus makes it clear that he finds deceit to be below his station, and that he finds it preferable to fail at his task without compromising his inherited morality than to achieve an underhanded victory.

⁶⁸ See Dover (1974) 155 for more on this attitude, specifically in the *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides’ *Hippolytus*.

⁶⁹ Nussbaum (1976) 32; see also Blundell (1989) 185.

⁷⁰ All textual citations from the *Philoctetes* are from Dain (1958) volume 3.

⁷¹ White (1985) 9.

With the boundaries of the philosophical communities that both Odysseus and Neoptolemus represent firmly established, Odysseus sets out to persuade, or perhaps more accurately trick, Neoptolemus to adopt his sophistic rationality. Odysseus sees an opening when Neoptolemus reveals the rather insecure foundation upon which rests his inherited philosophy.⁷² Neoptolemus says that he would rather win the bow of Heracles either by persuasion (πειθῶ) or by force (βία) (86-92). Odysseus, recognizing that the ideals his opponent has inherited have never truly been tested, wins the inexperienced Neoptolemus over by creating something of an identity crisis for him:

NE. Τί οὖν μ' ἄνωγας ἄλλο πλὴν ψευδῆ λέγειν;
 ΟΔ. Λέγω σ' ἐγὼ δόλω Φιλοκτήτην λαβεῖν.
 NE. Τί δ' ἐν δόλω δεῖ μᾶλλον ἢ πείσαντ' ἄγειν;
 ΟΔ. Οὐ μὴ πίθηται πρὸς βίαν δ' οὐκ ἂν λάβοις.
 ...
 NE. οὐκ αἰσχρὸν ἡγῆ δῆτα τὸ ψευδῆ λέγειν;
 ΟΔ. Οὐκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναί γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει.
 NE. Πῶς οὖν βλέπων τις ταῦτα τολμήσει λακεῖν;
 ΟΔ. Ὅταν τι δρᾶς εἰς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρέπει.
 NE. Κέρδος δ' ἐμοὶ τί τοῦτον ἐς Τροίαν μολεῖν;
 ΟΔ. Αἰρεῖ τὰ τόξα ταῦτα τὴν Τροίαν μόνα.
 NE. Οὐκ ἄρ' ὁ πέρσων, ὡς ἐφάσκετ', εἴμ' ἐγώ;
 ΟΔ. Οὔτ' ἂν σὺ κείνων χωρὶς οὔτ' ἐκεῖνα σοῦ.
 NE. Θηρατέ' ἄρα γίγνοιτ' ἂν, εἴπερ ὦδ' ἔχει.
 ΟΔ. Ὡς τοῦτό γ' ἔρξας δύο φέρη δωρήματα.
 Σοφός τ' ἂν αὐτὸς κάγαθός κεκληῖ' ἄμα.

Neo: What, then, do you order, nothing but telling lies?
Od: I say you must use deception (δόλος) to trap Philoctetes.
Neo: Why use deception (δόλος) and not persuasion (πειθῶ)?
Od: He will not be persuaded, nor can you take him by force.
 ...
Neo: Don't you believe that telling lies is truly shameful?
Od: Not if a lie protects the endeavor.
Neo: But how could someone bear to look him in the eye?
Od: If you're looking to gain, you can't have qualms.
Neo: What gain to me is his coming to Troy?
Od: Only his bow can capture Troy.
Neo: You said that I am the man who'll sack it.
Od: Not without them, or they without you.
Neo: If that's the case let the hunt begin.
Od: Exactly. Do this and you would win two prizes...
 They'll call you clever, as well as noble.

(*Philoctetes* 100-3; 108-19)

⁷² Scodel (2008) 245.

Odysseus' use of the flexible terms *sophos* (clever/wise) and *agathos* (good/noble) are of particular importance, and the use of such ambivalent terms accord with his traditionally cunning persona. "*Sophos* may refer to the prudence and good judgment that guide proper actions," notes Blundell, "but also to sophistic cleverness of a morally suspect kind."⁷³ Such is also the case with *agathos*, which we quickly learn holds very different meanings for the persuasive communities that each man represents. Ultimately, Odysseus is able to persuade Neoptolemus only by fusing two goals into a single one. Success in retrieving the bow will result in victory for the Achaean army (Odysseus' goal), and Neoptolemus' destruction of Troy will win him all the more glory (Neoptolemus' goal) if it is compounded by cleverness (*sophos*). To achieve his persuasion, Odysseus takes advantage of a fundamental defect inherent to Neoptolemus' mode of thought: he is equipped with no apparatus with which he can resolve conflicts within the sense of character that functions as his moral compass. That is, Neoptolemus is extremely vulnerable at the point where his self-conception as "the sacker of Troy" extends beyond the moral territory that his *γενναίος* will allow him to tread.

In persuading Neoptolemus to attempt to trick Philoctetes, Odysseus has effectively indoctrinated him into a persuasive community "in which people treat each other as 'ends,' not as 'means.'"⁷⁴ This is certainly consistent with what Odysseus has demonstrated thus far, both in his proposed treatment of Philoctetes and in his manipulation of Neoptolemus. As it turns out, in spite of his initial reluctance, Neoptolemus is as skillful at deception as Odysseus was in his initial persuasion.

⁷³ Blundell (1989) 191. Philoctetes later uses these very terms to describe Nestor, the last of his friends among the Achaeans (421-3).

⁷⁴ White (1985) 11-4.

Neoptolemus instantly befriends Philoctetes (219-54), expresses sympathy for his troubles and expresses a similar distaste for the Greek war effort (315-31), and reveals the fates of the men who abandoned Philoctetes on the island (332-468). Having won Philoctetes' trust, Neoptolemus actually completes his objective when he first arranges for Philoctetes to board a ship and leave the island with him (500-503), and actually obtains the bow of Heracles (654-70). It is at this momentous point, however, that the disunity between Neoptolemus' γενναίος and the persuasive community into which Odysseus has oriented him reaches critical mass and will not allow him to continue to deceive Philoctetes:

NE. Οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποι χρῆ τᾶπορον τρέπειν ἔπος,
 ΦΙ. Ἀπορεῖς δὲ τοῦ σύ; μὴ λέγ', ὦ τέκνον, τάδε.

...

Οὐ δὴ σε δυσχέρεια τοῦ νοσήματος
 ἔπεισεν ὥστε μὴ μ' ἄγειν ναύτην ἔτι;
 NE. Ἄπαντα δυσχέρεια, τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν
 ὅταν λιπῶν τις δρᾷ τὰ μὴ προσεικότα.
 ΦΙ. Ἄλλ' οὐδὲν ἕξω τοῦ φυτεύσαντος σύ γε
 δρᾷς οὐδὲ φωνεῖς, ἐσθλὸν ἄνδρ' ἐπωφελῶν.
 NE. Αἰσχρὸς φανοῦμαι· τοῦτ' ἀνιῶμαι πάλαι.

Neo: I don't know if I should speak a useless word.
Phil: You are at a loss? Don't say such things, child.

...

Don't say that my wound has filled you with disgust,
 you're not prepared to take me on board.
Neo: Disgust is the word, when a man abandons
 his own nature and acts against it.
Phil: You're doing nothing unworthy of your noble father
 in neither word nor deed, and you're helping a man of honor.
Neo: I shall seem base, this has been harassing me all along.

(*Philoctetes* 897-9, 900-6)

Interestingly, where Odysseus was able to persuade Neoptolemus by appealing to his sense of destiny, it is the thought of his father—the very man who made that destiny possibly—that finally erodes his resolve.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Cairns (2008) 312.

The sequence of events that follow this exchange—the disclosure of the plot, appearance of Odysseus, forceful capture of the bow, and the subsequent return of the bow to its rightful owner—has a double effect: this action both releases Neoptolemus from Odysseus’ persuasive community, one based on the manipulative treatment of unequal partners that strives for a supposedly mutually beneficial goal and gives precedence to *techne* over *arete*,⁷⁶ and relocates him into Philoctetes’ persuasive community that embraces and is in fact predicated upon equality between speakers. This equality creates a community that “includes a wealth of constitutive social practices: expressions of pleasure at a shared language and culture; affirmation of a shared history; participation in shared grief; supplication; the expression of gratitude; and pledges and promises”⁷⁷ among many other benefits. Moreover, it is hardly surprising that Neoptolemus seems such a natural fit into the “men as ends” persuasive community that he shares with Philoctetes, since both figures are able to satisfy a role that the other lacks. That is, Neoptolemus can be the sympathetic and considerate companion that Philoctetes has lacked for so many years, and in return Philoctetes recognizes and legitimizes the heroic values that are central to Neoptolemus’ personal conception of γενναίος, the very ones that Odysseus compelled him to repress.⁷⁸

However, as noted above, Sophocles is not attempting in this play to promote one of these persuasive communities as inherently superior to the other, but rather attempts to think through each to its logical conclusion. As embracing and healthy as the “men as ends” persuasive community appears, a comparison with the “men as means” community reveals flaws in both. Just as he did in every one of his speeches in the *Iliad*, Odysseus

⁷⁶ Vernant (1988) 171.

⁷⁷ White (1985) 15-6.

⁷⁸ Wilson (1941) 281-2; Vernant (1988) 166.

here certainly has the best interest of the Achaeans at heart. But in order to advance his project it is necessary for him to subjugate and manipulate Neoptolemus—a member of the very host he is attempting to advance—in order to create an agent that can help him achieve his end. Ultimately, both in the course of the drama and in society at large, this model is unsustainable. Even if attempts to advance the community are sincere, on a long enough timeline the community can only be comprised of rhetorical masters and submissive agents to their masters' will, an effect that erodes the stability of the community and perhaps even renders the attempted advances useless.

On the other hand, this instability is removed from the “men as ends” persuasive community, as speakers act as equals and rely upon one another to reciprocate a protective concern for one another. The important element that this community lacks, however, is any kind of mechanism for solving problems or advancing the community when “acceptable” means are unavailable. That is, the “men as ends” community requires some force to provide an impetus away from its status quo. In the case of the *Philoctetes*, Odysseus' attempt to provide this impetus and force Neoptolemus and Philoctetes into action is finally accomplished by the *deus ex machina* appearance of Heracles, who commands Philoctetes to take the bow to Troy and fulfill his destiny.⁷⁹ It is true that Neoptolemus could have adhered to the “men as ends” ideology and he could have taken Philoctetes home, and indeed he would have if it were not for the intervention of

⁷⁹ On the intriguing notion that Greek theatrical conventions would cause the same actor who plays Odysseus also to play Heracles in this scene, and that perhaps on some level Odysseus is “playing” Heracles, see Errandonea (1965).

Heracles. But he would have done so at the expense of the Achaean host he was sent to help.⁸⁰

Central to Sophocles' attempt to think through the merits and flaws of each persuasive community is the close consideration of the distinction between *πειθώ*, which we might consider “just” persuasion, or at least persuasion that the speaker believes to be in the best interest of his audience, and *δόλος*, persuasion that is intentionally deceptive. To identify the Odysseus or the Neoptolemus/Philoctetes persuasive communities as singularly representative of either *πειθώ* or *δόλος* would be a gross oversimplification. Some scholars have read Sophocles' portrayal of Odysseus and his unabashed use of *δόλος* as an especially “destructive and empty version of himself”⁸¹ that is particularly representative of sophistic practices. However, this reading ignores the most basic merit of Odysseus' plot: that, unlike the Neoptolemus/Philoctetes “men as ends” rhetorical philosophy, Odysseus has a specific goal and makes specific moves to achieve it. That is, Odysseus does not use *δόλος* in his plot because he believes it to be inherently better than *πειθώ*, but because in this particular situation he considers it the most useful tool at his disposal (101-103). For this reason it is more accurate to say that while this particular manifestation of Odysseus accepts one of the fundamental tenets of sophism—that speech is a tool with a specific use—to say that his aim in the *Philoctetes* is to make the better argument seem worse and the worse better goes too far.

A question of equal importance to Sophocles' portrayal of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* is the reception of this particular manifestation of Odysseus to the civic

⁸⁰ Mastronarde (2008) 328 says the ending of the play leaves it to the audience to see Heracles' intervention in either a positive or pessimistic light.

⁸¹ White (1985) 22. This is an articulation of the largely negative view of Odysseus held by critics both ancient (Dio of Prussia, *Orations* 52.4-10) and modern (Stanford 1954: 102ff.).

conscience of the play's fifth—century audience. While it is true that any attempt to read the reaction of an Athenian audience to a tragedy runs the risk of being cursory at best, Patricia Easterling's "heroic vagueness"⁸² is a useful tool for considering the variety of emotions that tragic characters could have provoked. Heroic vagueness is the notion that while heroic figures do come to the tragic stage with certain mythological baggage, the variety of traditions from which each is inherited makes it impossible to judge a singular reaction to them. While at first this "fuzziness" of character seems to limit our possible understanding of tragedy, it actually allows a multiplicity of valid readings for both ancient and modern audiences. In fact, this "vagueness" may be the quintessential element of tragedy that allows it and the City Dionysia as a whole to be a unifying social event because of its ability to "render a much grander perspective on messy social-political realities in an atmosphere of togetherness."⁸³

Moreover, the notion of heroic vagueness allows for a variety of responses from a fifth—century Athenian audience that a modern reader can authentically experience as well, each of which will be determined by the reader's particular attitude toward the questions the tragedy raises. Audience members who are strongly opposed to the use of dexterous speech to achieve ends that are not available through *πειθῶ*, or those who consider ends that are unattainable without *δόλος* as unworthy of attention can read the values of the "men as ends" persuasive community as the ones that make civilization possible. The sense of cooperation and mutual respect that Neoptolemus and Philoctetes experience are ideals that a *polis* relies upon to create and maintain stability, and the knavishness of Odysseus' plot poses a serious threat to that stability. Other audience

⁸² Easterling (1997) 24-5.

⁸³ Heske (2007) 85.

members who see some merit in the sophistic attitude toward speech might see exactly the opposite—that the “men as means” model is attractive but unsustainable, and that the pragmatic reality is that there exists a need for some speakers to command listeners to act for the best interest of the community. These members may read Sophocles’ presentation of Odysseus as in perfect keeping with the wily and practical mythological and Homeric figure.

However, there is a third possible reading of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes* that embraces both of these views, one that in a sense seems more psychologically modern. It is possible for some audience members to be both attracted and repelled by Odysseus at the same time, viewers who revile Odysseus’ pragmatic philosophy but recognize that often political reality forces compromises upon social ideology. For these spectators, the “men as ends” and “men as means” persuasive communities are not mutually exclusive, and though they are in many respects incompatible they are both required to maintain and perpetuate the *polis*. One might even postulate that all citizens would like to establish themselves in the “men as ends” rhetorical community of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, and in fact the vast majority of citizens can choose to do so. But the most provocative argument that the *Philoctetes* offers is that someone has to think, speak, and act with greater interest of the community at heart, regardless of the intellectual or emotional consequences of their actions.

With these three possible readings of the Odysseus of the *Philoctetes* in mind, Sophocles’ particular reception of Homer’s Odysseus is drawn into sharper focus. As noted above, the heroism of the epic Odysseus is defined specifically by his effective and calculated speech. In the *Philoctetes*, however, Sophocles makes use of an ambiguity in

Odysseus' character that is downplayed in Homer— that is, Odysseus' questionable parentage. Competing mythological traditions offer some disagreement as to whether it was the scoundrel Sisyphus that fathered Odysseus or the more noble Laertes.⁸⁴ In the *Philoctetes* Sophocles makes explicit reference to Odysseus as “the son of Sisyphus” (384, 417, 1311), thereby emphasizing the less savory aspects of Odysseus' character via his famously duplicitous father. Where Homer focuses more directly upon Odysseus' *sophrosune*, Sophocles makes hereditary allowance for the more self-serving aspect of Odysseus' nature.

Through this particular manifestation of Odysseus, Sophocles calls attention to two specific aspects of the kind of sophistry familiar to his audience: one that invites serious criticism and another that expresses a more sympathetic understanding of the sophistic craft. Implicit to the sophistic emphasis on education, in terms of the *nomos/physis* debate noted above, is the notion that through training one can use speech to subordinate their *physis*, or even the *physis* of others. On this point, it would seem, Sophocles strongly disagrees. Odysseus' failure to indoctrinate Neoptolemus permanently into his ethical system is indicative of what Peter Rose calls Sophocles' “militant affirmation of inherited excellence.”⁸⁵ However, this disagreement does not in any way turn the play into a polemic, nor does it set up Odysseus as a straw man. Rather, as we have seen, it explores sophism as but one extreme of the verbal ethos that, though imperfect, still has some pragmatic merit. That is, the aptitude for speech possessed by Odysseus and the contemporary sophists whom he reflects is a tool that can be put to valuable use if it is done so by men of more natural excellence.

⁸⁴ See Stanford (1954) 8-13.

⁸⁵ Rose (1992) 320.

The Stage Villain: Odysseus in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Troades*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*

If the Odysseus of the *Philoctetes* is presented by Sophocles as amorally pragmatic and willing to use his extraordinary rhetorical skill to isolate and manipulate even his fellow Achaeans for the benefit of the host as a whole, the Odysseus who appears in the Trojan War plays of Sophocles' younger contemporary Euripides—*Hecuba* (ca. 424 BC), *Troades* (415 BC), and *Iphigenia at Aulis* (405 BC)—exhibits an even greater degree of abhorrent self-interest. Through his representations of Odysseus in these plays, Euripides stands more overtly in opposition to the rhetorical dexterity for which both the Homeric Odysseus and sophistic movement are so famous.⁸⁶ Although the appearances of Odysseus in these plays are brief—he makes only one appearance in the *Hecuba*, and he haunts the *Troades* and *Iphigenia at Aulis* from offstage—the manner in which Odysseus uses speech in all three plays leaves a lingering sense that he has, in Stanford's words, completed the transformation into a “stage villain.”⁸⁷ Euripides, displaying his interest in exploring problems inherent to sophistic language, stages Odysseus in ways that could certainly conjure images of self-interested public speakers that are all too familiar to his audience.⁸⁸ In the role of Odysseus in the *Hecuba* in particular, some scholars have noted how his speech reflects some practices and tones that are typically associated with sophism. A close inspection of his appearance in the *Hecuba*, alongside his belligerent speech, or at least the threat of it, that shapes the action of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and his renowned penchant for underhanded dealing that intensifies Hecuba's bitter despair in the *Troades*, will provide a provocative perspective on

⁸⁶ See Gregory (2002) 149ff. for a more complete discussion on differences in Sophoclean and Euripidean social criticism.

⁸⁷ Stanford (1954) 102.

⁸⁸ See Croally (1994) 135 for the presence and use of legal language in particular.

Odysseus' fall from grace on the Euripidean stage. The man once so revered as Odysseus *polytropos* now, during a period in Athens when there was widespread distrust of overly clever speakers, reflects the most reviled practices of those labeled as sophists.

Odysseus' exceptional skill at persuasion, well known from the epic poems, is a key plot element in the *Hecuba*. While camped outside the smoldering remains of Troy and awaiting a favorable wind to carry them home, the shade of Achilles appears at his tomb and demands an appropriate sacrifice be made to him for his part in their victory (114-5). The chorus of captured Trojan women reports that after much sharp deliberation Odysseus, that "wily, sweet-tongued crowd-pleaser" (131-2), convinced the host that it would be folly to offend Greece with the sacrifice of Greek blood when they could just as easily sacrifice a slave girl. Moreover, Odysseus has convinced them that the most appropriate victim is Polyxena, Hecuba's daughter and sister to Hector, Achilles' most hated foe. It should be noted that Euripides has his chorus immediately lay the responsibility for the sacrifice of Polyxena squarely at the feet of Odysseus.

After he persuades the Achaean army to kill Polyxena, Odysseus plays the part of herald of the arrangement that has been approved and he does so with a tone that "echoes the formula of the Athenian assembly."⁸⁹ His language to Hecuba is brutally laconic, and he is surprisingly matter-of-fact in the delivery of the news, since he foregoes the diplomatic maneuvering that is characteristic of his speech in other works:

ἔδοξ' Ἀχαιοῖς παῖδα σὴν Πολυξένην
σφάξαι πρὸς ὀρθὸν χῶμ' Ἀχιλλείου τάφου.
ἡμᾶς δὲ πομπὸς καὶ κομιστήρας κόρης
τάσσουσιν εἶναι· θύματος δ' ἐπιστάτης
ἱερέυς τ' ἐπέσται τοῦδε παῖς Ἀχιλλέως.
οἴσθ' οὖν ὃ δρᾶσον; μήτ' ἀποσπασθῆς βία
μήτ' ἐς χερῶν ἄμιλλαν ἐξέλθῃς ἐμοί·

⁸⁹ Barker (2009) 335; see also Gregory (1991) 88.

γίγνωσκε δ' ἄλκην καὶ παρουσίαν κακῶν.⁹⁰

“The Greeks have resolved to kill your daughter
Polyxena at the tall mound of Achilles’ tomb.
They ordained that I should be the escort and conductor
of the girl. And the priest to be present
conducting the sacrifice shall be Achilles’ son.
Do you know what is to be done? Don’t (make me)
take her by force or come to blows with me:
know to show courage even in the presence of evil.”

(*Hecuba* 220-7)

Evidently, this encounter is not a free exchange between equal parties. This is in fact, from Odysseus’ perspective, the justified and unequivocal demand that is the right of the victor over the conquered. Hecuba’s response to Odysseus’ advice, that she should “show sense, especially in troubled times” (227) attempts unsuccessfully to trap the master speaker in his own maxim—a very Odyssean tactic indeed.⁹¹ She asks Odysseus to recall when he was nearly caught by the Trojans on his daring reconnaissance mission inside the walls of Troy (239) and also how she and Helen made escape possible for him.⁹² She corrals Odysseus into admitting that she did, in fact save his life by aiding in his escape (250) and asks how he could be showing the “sense” he advised by returning the favor (*charis*) with such malevolence:

ἄκουσον. ἦψω τῆς ἐμῆς, ὡς φῆς, χερὸς
καὶ τῆσδε γραίας προσπίτνων παρηίδος;
ἀνθάπτομαί σου τῶνδε τῶν αὐτῶν ἐγὼ
χάριν τ’ ἀπαιτῶ τὴν τόθ’ ἱκετεύω τέ σε,
μή μου τὸ τέκνον ἐκ χερῶν ἀποσπάσης,
μηδὲ κτάνητε· τῶν τεθνηκότων ἄλις.

⁹⁰ All textual citations from the *Hecuba* are from Murray (1902).

⁹¹ Scholars are divided as to whether this encounter can be classified as an *agon* or not. While several agonistic elements are present (stichomythia, paired sets of opposing speeches, the presence of a third party to judge) it lacks a typical “angry dialogue that is normal to the *agon*,” according to Barker (2009) 336.

⁹² Odysseus’ encounter with Helen during this mission is narrated in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, but outside of this scene there is nothing in extant Greek literature to suggest that Hecuba was present or aware of Odysseus’ presence. Stanford (1954) 121-3 admits the possibility the encounter may have existed in a lost work, but speculates that an Athenian audience would have received Hecuba’s telling of the encounter with great suspicion.

“Listen: as you say, you touched my hand
and aged cheek as a suppliant.
Now I touch you in return and beg of you
the same favor (*charis*) and supplicate myself to you,
may you not tear my child from my arms
nor kill her: there are enough dead.”

(*Hecuba* 273-8)

Implicit in Hecuba’s begging that Odysseus undo what he has done and convince the army to choose another victim⁹³ is the notion that he can, by means of dexterous speech, control his fellow Achaeans at will. This notion of Odysseus’ rhetorical superiority exacerbates a dramatic tension that lingers in the background of the entire play and tugs at the marionette’s strings that control the action, especially considering the aid that Hecuba receives from Agamemnon shortly after this encounter: if Odysseus can persuade the army at his whim and a “weak-willed” Agamemnon fraternizes with the defeated enemy, then who exactly is “the king of all men?”⁹⁴

Odysseus is unmoved in his reply to Hecuba’s imprecations and is, as E. M. Blaiklock describes, “greaved and breastplated in soul as well as in body.”⁹⁵ His response is governed by a political logic that is both judicious and repulsive at the same time, and he is able to do what Hecuba could not. That is, with a skill reminiscent of his *agon* with Agamemnon in Sophocles’ *Ajax*, Odysseus expands the meaning and implication of the *charis* that Hecuba is begging for:

Ἐκάβη, διδάσκου, μηδὲ τῷ θυμουμένῳ
τὸν εὖ λέγοντα δυσμενῆ ποιοῦ φρενός.
ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν σὸν σώμ’ ὑφ’ οὐπερ εὐτύχουν
σώζειν ἔτοιμός εἰμι κοῦκ ἄλλως λέγω·
ἃ δ’ εἶπον εἰς ἅπαντας οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι,
Τροίας ἀλούσης ἀνδρὶ τῷ πρώτῳ στρατοῦ
σὴν παῖδα δοῦναι σφάγιον ἔξαιτουμένῳ.

⁹³ See also *Hecuba* 291-5.

⁹⁴ Dué (2006) 135.

⁹⁵ Blaiklock (1952) 106.

ἐν τῷδε γὰρ κάμνουσιν αἱ πολλαὶ πόλεις,
 ὅταν τις ἐσθλὸς καὶ πρόθυμος ὦν ἀνὴρ
 μηδὲν φέρεται τῶν κακίωνων πλέον.

“Hecuba, be advised: do not in anger
 make in your heart one speaking well into an enemy.
 I am prepared to save you just as I was spared
 and I do not say otherwise.
 But I will not go back on what I said before all:
 that, with Troy captured, to the first man of the army
 demanding a victim we give your child.
 For this reason many cities grow weak,
 whenever a noble and eager man
 is granted no more honor than worse ones.”

(*Hecuba* 299-308)

Odysseus has divided *charis* into two different types and claims to have satisfied both.⁹⁶ On the one hand there is a personal *charis* that exists between mortals, one that exists between guests and friends. Odysseus claims to have returned Hecuba’s *charis* in kind because, after all, it could have just as easily been her that he persuaded the army to sacrifice, but now her daughter—to whom he owes nothing—will die in her place (301). On the other hand, there is a greater public or civic *charis* that exists between a community or *polis* (306) and those who do service for it. He notes the extent to which Achilles performed glorious deeds for the Greeks that made their victory possible (310-321), and also the dangerous and eroding effect that ungrateful men (literally, “*acharistoi*, “those lacking *charis*”) will inevitably have on a state. In not only appeasing Achilles with this sacrifice but choosing the most noble victim that his personal *charis* will (supposedly) allow, Odysseus claims that he is making it possible for Greece to fight future wars and win future glories (313-4).⁹⁷

As much political sense and appeal as Odysseus’ logic contains at first glance, it crumbles under even a small amount of close scrutiny—a fact that must have been

⁹⁶ Buxton (1982) 174; Conacher (1998) 62, and also 63 for Hecuba’s use of the term *charis* in her speech to Agamemnon (814-8).

⁹⁷ Burnett (1998) 159.

immediately evident to an Athenian audience. There is, of course, an entire chorus of eligible Trojan women from which Odysseus could have chosen a sacrificial victim. Also, of particular note is that by line 389 Odysseus has slipped in the implication that Achilles asked for Polyxena *specifically*, which we know to be false. This kind of self-serving jockeying and rhetorical sleight of hand with which Euripides stages Odysseus certainly conjures an image of the much lampooned and despised sophist. If indeed “Odysseus’ reply exemplifies what a virtuoso can do with a bad case” and his underhanded justification of his actions relies upon a “Shylockian subtlety,”⁹⁸ it is little wonder that this particular manifestation of Odysseus is so closely associated with the practices of sophistry, tricks with which Euripides and his audience were all too familiar.

Although Odysseus does not make an appearance on stage in either the *Troades* or *Iphigenia at Aulis*, his malevolent influence from outside the two dramas is noteworthy in that it is specifically his extraordinary aptitude for speech and his willingness to misuse it that draws such ire or imposes a sense of necessity on each plot. His absence from the stage is a curious phenomenon, and Euripides’ reasoning for this is difficult to grasp. Perhaps the figure of Odysseus by this point had become too monstrous or cartoonish a figure for Euripides’ aesthetic comfort. Or perhaps the close association between Odysseus and sophistry was too much of an anachronism that violated tragic space.⁹⁹ Whatever Euripides’ reasoning, it is difficult to imagine a more vile man than the one described in Hecuba’s famous invective in the *Troades*, launched upon the news that she will become his slave:

⁹⁸ Buxton (1982) 175.

⁹⁹ Croally (1994) 223.

ἰὼ μοί μοι.
 μυσαρῶ δολίῳ λέλογχα φωτὶ δουλεύειν,
 πολεμίῳ δίκας, παρανόμῳ δάκει,
 ὃς πάντα τάκεῖθεν ἐνθάδε στρέφει, τὰ δ'
 ἀντίπαλ' αὐθις ἐκείσε διπτύχῳ γλώσσῃ
 φίλα τὰ πρότερ' ἄφιλα τιθέμενος πάντων.

“Alas!

It is my lot to serve that wretched trickster,
 that enemy to justice, that law-bending serpent,
 who twists things about with his forked tongue,
 making hate into love and love into hate for all.”

(*Troades* 281-6)

Of particular interest is Hecuba’s use of the word στρέφει, literally “to twist about” and figuratively to wrangle free from the grip of an opponent in a wrestling match or to elude defeat in an argument with shifty speech (especially in Aristophanes¹⁰⁰). If Odysseus’ speech truly has the power to change one thing (love) into its opposite (hate) then he certainly may be accused of being hostile both toward justice—a charge that Hecuba does not hesitate to level against him (πολεμίῳ δίκας, 283)—and the notion of ethical immutability.

Similarly, Odysseus’ powerful ability to influence the thoughts and sensibilities of his audience, even when the figure is not on stage, plays a significant role in Euripides’ late play, *Iphigenia at Aulis*. When Agamemnon can no longer stomach the plot that he has concocted and shared with Calchas, Odysseus, and Menelaus (107)—namely to bring his daughter Iphigenia to the port of Aulis under the pretense of a marriage to Achilles in order to sacrifice her to Artemis so that the army may sail on a favorable wind to Troy—he notes that he cannot go back on the plan specifically because Odysseus can and will convince the army to remove him from power:

¹⁰⁰ E.g. *Clouds*, 36, 1455, or perhaps even in the name of its main character Strepsiades.

Αγ. τὸ Σισύφειον σπέρμα πάντ' οἶδεν τάδε.
 Με. οὐκ ἔστ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ὃ τι σὲ κάμῃ πημανεῖ.
 Αγ. ποικίλος ἀεὶ πέφυκε τοῦ τ' ὄχλου μέτα.
 Με. φιλοτιμίᾳ μὲν ἐνέχεται, δεινῶ κακῶ.

...
 Αγ. οὐ ξυναρπάσας στρατόν;
 σὲ κάμ' ἀποκτείναντας Ἀργείους κόρην
 σφάξαι κελεύσει;

Ag: That offspring of Sisyphus knows all these things.
 Me: There is no reason why Odysseus will injure you or me.
 Ag: He is cunning and is always with the majority.
 Me: He is seized with ambition, a dreadful evil.

...
 Ag. Is he not seizing the army?
 He will command the Argives, having slaughtered
 the girl, to murder you and me as well.

(*Iphigenia at Aulis*, 525-7, 531-3)

Particularly noteworthy here is Euripides' reference to Odysseus' less noble parentage as the son of Sisyphus (525) that Sophocles made wide use of in the *Philoctetes*, a revealing point of the kind of cross reception discussed above. However, as in the *Hecuba*, here there is a sense that as the army's most wily and ruthless speaker, Odysseus' rhetorical power poses serious competition to Agamemnon's military and political power. Also, where the Odysseus of the *Philoctetes* ultimately had the best interest of the entire Greek force at heart, this particular version of Odysseus is motivated, as Menelaus says, entirely by lust for power.

While Sophocles and Euripides both inherit and reinterpret the Homeric character of Odysseus in ways that reflect contemporary concerns about the seductive power of speech, it is clear that Euripides does so from a more critical standpoint. It seems Euripides may have wanted to use Odysseus to portray sophists as "...champions of a troubling and unprecedented antagonism, as producers of a baffling proliferation of discourses, and as promoters of what must have seemed like a threatening war of

languages.”¹⁰¹ There would have been no better figure for Euripides to employ as a critique of the sophistic movement than the wily-speaking Odysseus of Homer, who made heroic the very virtues of cunning speech that inspired such suspicion in Euripides and his contemporaries. The pragmatism of Homer’s Odysseus is certainly present in Euripides’ representation of the character, though the beneficiary of his action has shifted from the Achaean host to his own self-interest. Most notably, in all three of the plays discussed—directly in the *Hecuba* and from off-stage in the *Troades* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*—Euripides exaggerates Odysseus’ traditional epic qualities to a monstrous extreme that destabilizes and undermines the civic ideology that tragedy addresses.

Conclusion

On the tragic stage of fifth-century Athens, Homer’s Odysseus undergoes a series of transformations from his epic character that pertain in particular to the proper use of speech and public discourse. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the prudent use of speech and the ability to anticipate the needs of his audience in order to strike the most persuasive possible tone grant Odysseus a necessary, if perhaps atypical, heroism. In Sophocles’ *Ajax* the master rhetorician bears witness to the consequences persuasive speech can have not only on its victim but also on the ideologies that are sundered in its wake, and in the *Philoctetes* Odysseus is representative of a philosophy of public discourse that has merit but is too extreme to be successful in its charge. In Euripidean tragedy, Odysseus is presented with even more overtly menacing tones, and in fact his ability to persuade the Achaean host at his whim may even be considered to have a destabilizing effect on the army as it erodes Agamemnon’s authority. The *Hecuba*,

¹⁰¹ Croally (1994) 223.

Troades, and *Iphigenia at Aulis* demonstrate in particular the power of tragedy to, as Stanford says, “...distort heroic qualities (of mythology) into contemptible (contemporary) faults” and in doing so Euripides in particular “is heaping upon Odysseus the dislike he felt for the Cleons of his day.”¹⁰² While a one-to-one reading of Euripides’ Odysseus as representative of the evils of sophistry runs the risk of oversimplifying a complex political reality, the notion of Odysseus as an extreme speaker and the tremendous power that is associated with his rhetoric could certainly coincide very closely with the concerns about and daily experience of the public life of the viewing audience. As noted above, the reaction of this audience to dramatic representations of Odysseus would have had the ability to vary widely across political and ideological spectra. This is a particularly important point because values pertaining to speech can be as varied and numerous as the speakers who use it. As we shall see in the next chapter, the excessive use and misuse of speech that is ascribed to Odysseus has an equally dangerous counterpart— the refusal to engage in and allow a proper emphasis on speech and public discourse.

¹⁰² Stanford (1954) 115-6.

Part III: The Epic Ajax

We have seen how the values and proper uses of speech are central both to the epic heroism and tragic reimagining of Odysseus. In the figure of Ajax, we find his philosophical opposite. If along the famous vector of heroes as “speakers of words and doers of deeds” (*Il.* 9.443) Odysseus excels on the verbal end, Ajax resides almost entirely on the physical extreme. As we shall discuss below, in his appearances in Homeric poetry Ajax exhibits a reluctance and even apprehension concerning speech that contrasts sharply with a number of other Achaean and Trojan heroes. Generally terse and reticent, the epic Ajax is a hero that prefers to win *kleos* with his spear and shield rather than in council, and accordingly he frequently exhibits a distrustful or even dismissive attitude toward the value and utility of speech. Thus when Ajax does speak this attitude gives rise to marked differences between his speech and that of other heroes. However, this disinclination to engage in lofty speech does not detract from Ajax’s heroism in the *Iliad* and he never suffers any particular dishonor for his generally taciturn presence—other than perhaps a failure to persuade Achilles to return to combat in the Embassy scene that is shared with Odysseus, Phoenix, and ultimately Agamemnon. In fact, in each of several encounters Ajax demonstrates himself to be worthy of the title “best of the Achaeans after Achilles.”¹⁰³

From early in the *Iliad* the great level of honor that the Achaean soldiers and kings hold for Ajax is apparent, and at several points throughout the narrative Ajax is revealed as the force that keeps the host afloat in Achilles’ absence. Like most of the other Greek kings present in the war, he is in command of the contingent of soldiers that have accompanied him to Troy, though ultimately he owes allegiance to Agamemnon and

¹⁰³ *Ajax*, 1340.

the Achaeans as a whole. Significantly, in the Catalogue of Ships in book 2, Homer notes that Ajax and the twelve ships that he has brought from Salamis hold a position of honor on the extreme left flank of the army (*Il.* 2.557-8), just as Achilles holds the corresponding position on the far right, and the encampment of these two heroes on the extreme ends of the Achaean line, literally straddling the host, is indicative of the well-known prowess of each:

ἀνδρῶν αὐτὸς μέγ' ἄριστος ἔην Τελαμώνιος Αἴας
ἄφρ' Ἀχιλεὺς μήνιεν·

Moreover, Ajax son of Telemon was the very greatest of men
while Achilles was in his wrath.

(*Iliad* 2.768-9)

Massive in frame and stature, Ajax is described by Priam as taller than the rest of the Greeks “by head and shoulders” (ἔξοχος Ἀργείων κεφαλὴν τε καὶ εὐρέας ὤμους, *Il.* 3.227) and immediately after by Helen as “the wall of the Achaeans” (ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, 3.229). This title “wall of the Achaeans” is a particularly apt one for Ajax for two reasons. First and most obviously, the epithet refers to his defensive efforts. At several key points Ajax finds himself in a position on the battlefield where his tremendous size is more effectively used to defend his allies than it is to slaughter his enemies. As the Trojan force presses fiercely upon the Greek camp in book 12 it is Ajax (supported by his brother Teucer and his mighty bow) who is able to defend and sustain the makeshift bulwark against a seemingly endless swarm of Trojan soldiers (12.370ff.). He withstands the onslaught—almost killing Sarpedon in the process (12.404-5)—until Hector is able to break through the gates with an enormous boulder. In addition to this effort, Ajax’s most famous defensive stand comes in book 17, where “like a city tower” (ἡὔτε πύργον, 17.128) he protects the fallen body of Patroclus (17.128-39). This image of the stalwart

giant is augmented by one of the most stunning and vivid similes of the entire poem, as Ajax is compared to “a lion standing over his cubs” that is “savoring his strength” (17.133-6). Significantly, this lion, like Ajax himself, does not roar or even growl; instead, the lion’s voice is deemphasized as he narrows his eyes in silent and ferocious concentration on his foes (ἐπισκύνιον κάτω ἔλκεται ὅσσε καλύπτων, 17.136).

The second reason that the epic epithet “wall of the Achaeans” is so fitting for Ajax not only makes the first one possible, but is the singular characteristic that will later appear at the forefront of the tragic situation in Sophocles’ drama: Ajax’s unflinching resolve and immutable devotion not only to the protection of his friends and the destruction of his enemies, but also to the ideological tenets that validate and perpetuate the heroic ethos. As we shall see, very many of Ajax’s rhetorical performances in the *Iliad* make explicit reference not only to Ajax’s reverence for heroic deeds and those that participate in them, but also the necessity that every soldier in the Greek host share in his devotion if there is ever to be any hope of taking Troy. Likewise in the *Odyssey*, the silent wrath of Ajax’s shade is fueled specifically by the violation and failure of the values he championed. As immovable as the physical enormity of Ajax might be from any point on the battlefield where he would choose to make his stand, so too is he firmly rooted in his commitment to the Achaean cause and the values that he believes will lead to its success.

There is, however, a significant but less-emphasized aspect to Ajax’s enormity that is not as immediately apparent as his physical presence: his booming voice. As the Trojan forces encroach on the Greek ships and Ajax digs in for a heroic defense in book

15, there is a coupling of physical and vocal imagery that gives Ajax a sense of omnipresence on the battlefield:¹⁰⁴

ὥς Αἴας ἐπὶ πολλὰ θοάων ἵκρια νηῶν
φοίτα μακρὰ βιβάς, φωνὴ δὲ οἱ αἰθέρ' ἴκανεν,
αἰεὶ δὲ σμερδνὸν βοόων Δαναοῖσι κέλευε
νηυσὶ τε καὶ κλισίησιν ἀμυνέμεν.

And so hustling long strides Ajax was going upon the many decks
of the swift ships, and his voice reached the sky,
and always shouting ferociously he ordered the Greeks
to defend the ships and the tents.

(*Iliad* 15.685-8)

The notion of “a voice that reaches to the sky” (15.686) in the mouth of Homeric epic’s most reticent hero is of particular importance to this study because it identifies a distinction between the objectives and methodologies of two separate modes of heroic speech. As discussed earlier with regard to Odysseus, the objective of council speech is to guide the mind of one’s listeners toward a particular course of action by means of *peitho*, and Odysseus is successful in this venue specifically because of his ability to anticipate the needs of his audience (even if he is not the most technically adroit speaker).¹⁰⁵ In the defense of the Greek ships—among the highest points of Ajax’s Iliadic career—his battlefield exhortations seek similarly to persuade the soldiers under his command, but his booming voice employs quite a different tactic than Odysseus’ soothing one. Instead of the calculated maneuvering familiar from the book’s many council speeches, the combat speech of Ajax is blunt and insistent, and it seeks to “compel the spirits” of its audience not through persuasion but by means of the brute force of its impact:

Ὡς εἰπὼν ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἑκάστου.
Αἴας δ' αὖθ' ἑτέρωθεν ἐκέκλετο οἷς ἑτάροισιν·

¹⁰⁴ Montiglio (2000) 72.

¹⁰⁵ Martin (1989) discusses at great length the individual rhetorical ticks that mark the speech of Nestor, Odysseus, Thersites, Agamemnon, Diomedes, and especially Achilles. While each speaker has certain merits, Martin posits the speech of Nestor as the pinnacle of heroic *muthos*. Notably, Ajax is missing from this discussion as his speech, it would seem, lacks elements that Martin considers fundamental to *muthos*.

αἰδῶς Ἀργεῖοι· νῦν ἄρκιον ἢ ἀπολέσθαι
 ἢ ἐσαωθῆναι καὶ ἀπώσασθαι κακὰ νηῶν.
 ἢ ἔλπεσθ' ἦν νῆας ἔλη κορυθαίολος Ἔκτωρ
 ἐμβαδὸν ἴξεσθαι ἦν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἕκαστος;
 ἢ οὐκ ὀτρύνοντος ἀκούετε λαὸν ἅπαντα
 Ἔκτορος, ὃς δὴ νῆας ἐνιπρῆσαι μενεαίνει;
 οὐ μὰν ἔς γε χορὸν κέλετ' ἐλθέμεν, ἀλλὰ μάχεσθαι.
 ἡμῖν δ' οὐ τις τοῦδε νόος καὶ μήτις ἀμείνων
 ἢ αὐτοσχεδίῃ μῖζαι χειρᾶς τε μένος τε.
 βέλτερον ἢ ἀπολέσθαι ἕνα χρόνον ἢ ἐβιῶναι
 ἢ δηθὰ στρεύγεσθαι ἐν αἰνῇ δηϊοτήτι
 ὧδ' αὐτως παρὰ νηυσὶν ὑπ' ἀνδράσι χειροτέροισιν.
 Ὡς εἰπὼν ὄτρυνε μένος καὶ θυμὸν ἑκάστου.

And so speaking he (Hector) urged the might and courage of each man.
 And Ajax in turn from the other side called to his companions:
 “For shame, Argives! Now it must be settled whether
 we are to die or be preserved and to drive evil from the ships.
 Truly do you suppose that if shining helmed Hector
 takes the ships we each will go to the land of our fathers on foot?
 Do you truly not hear Hector urging on the entire army,
 he who eagerly desires to burn the ships?
 He’s not ordering them to go to the dance hall, but to fight!
 There is no better idea or strategy for us
 than to join our hands and might to battle head to head.
 Better to die or to live at one time than
 to be exhausted for a long time in dreadful strife
 by the ships in vain by inferior men.”
 Speaking thus he was encouraging the might and spirit of each man.

(*Iliad* 15.500-13)

Notably, Ajax is successful in this persuasion and in two other instances shortly after (15.560-4; 732-41) by making specific reference to the shame (αἰδῶς) that the Greek soldiers should feel for fighting with too little ferocity, and his exhortation is all the more powerful as his resounding voice delivers his words to all the present allies simultaneously.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, implicit in the notion that soldiers should feel shame before one another for inadequate combat (made most explicit at 15.561) is a reference to the ties of *philia* that are strained to the point of fracture in contest for the arms of Achilles and its aftermath. Especially when coupled with his reference to the inferior men (15.512) that, if victorious, could so greatly dishonor the Greek army, Ajax seems to

¹⁰⁶ Bradshaw (1991) 112.

sense intuitively that his rhetorical strategy will succeed because “threats (of shame) have the power to reinforce ties of *philia* by referring to their possible destruction.”¹⁰⁷ It is in this sort of battlefield exhortation, then, where Ajax’s piercing voice and aggressive speech are most effective, which in part explains his reluctance to speak elsewhere. The more individually directed speeches and *agones* of the council chamber do not play to Ajax’s strengths.

Ajax’s mode of speech in the *Iliad* is juxtaposed most keenly against the typical speech of heroes in the embassy to Achilles in book 9, where it is Odysseus who epitomizes the more delicate and tactful use of *peitho* in the manner noted above. Alongside the eloquent performances by Odysseus and Phoenix that outline the catastrophic prospects that await the Achaean force in Achilles’ absence,¹⁰⁸ the reticent contribution made by Ajax—it is his longest speech in extant epic poetry at a mere 24 lines—more closely resembles that of his combat exhortations:

διογενές Λαερτιάδη πολυμήχαν’ Ὀδυσσεῦ
 ἴομεν· οὐ γάρ μοι δοκείι μῦθοιο τελευτή
 τῆδέ γ’ ὀδῶ κρανεέσθαι· ἀπαγγεῖλαι δέ τάχιστα
 χρῆ μῦθον Δαναοῖσι καὶ οὐκ ἀγαθόν περ ἔοντα
 οἷ που νῦν ἕαται ποτιδέγμενοι· αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς
 ἄγριον ἐν στήθεσσι θέτο μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν
 σκέτλιος, οὐδὲ μετατρέπεται φιλότιτος ἑταίρων
 τῆς ἧ μιν παρὰ νηυσὶν ἐτίομεν ἕζοχον ἄλλων
 νηλῆς καὶ μὲν τίς τε κασιγνήτοιο φονῆος
 ποιήνῃ ἢ οὐ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο τεθνηῶτος·
 καί ῥ’ ὁ μὲν ἐν δήμῳ μένει αὐτοῦ πόλλ’ ἀποτίσας,
 τοῦ δέ τ’ ἐρητύεται κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀγῆνωρ
 ποιήνῃ δεξαμένῳ· σοὶ δ’ ἄληκτόν τε κακόν τε
 θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι θεοὶ θέσαν εἵνεκα κούρης
 οἴης· νῦν δέ τοι ἑπτὰ παρίσχομεν ἕζοχ’ ἀρίστας,
 ἄλλὰ τε πόλλ’ ἐπὶ τῆσι σὺ δ’ Ἴλαον ἔνθεο θυμὸν
 αἴδεσσαι δὲ μέλαθρον· ὑπωρόφιοι δέ τοι εἶμεν
 πληθὺς ἐκ Δαναῶν, μέμαμεν δέ τοι ἕζοχον ἄλλων
 κήδιστοὶ τ’ ἔμεναι καὶ φίλατοι ὅσοι Ἀχαιοί.

¹⁰⁷ Montiglio (2000) 71 n.100. See Slatkin (1988) for a more complete discussion on Homeric military encouragement.

¹⁰⁸ Odysseus: 9.229-310; Phoenix: 9.446-622

“Son of Laertes, descendent of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus
 let’s go. It doesn’t seem to me that we’ll accomplish
 the purpose of our speech on this journey. Now we need
 to report the news quickly—and bad news at that—to the
 Greeks, who are no doubt now sitting awaiting it: Achilles
 has made the great heart in his chest savage.
 The cruel man, he has no regard for the friendship of his
 companions with which we by the ships honored him above all others.
 Pitiless. For the murder of a brother a man received
 compensation, or for a slaughtered son:
 The murder, having repaid much, remains there in the city,
 and the heart and manly spirit of the bereaved are restrained,
 having accepted the compensation. The gods placed a harsh and unyielding
 heart in your chest on account of a girl:
 one single girl. Now we offer seven especially excellent women,
 and many other things in addition to those: place in yourself a gracious heart
 and show reverence for your home. We are under your roof
 from the throng of Achaeans, we wish especially among them
 to be the closest and the dearest to you, however many Achaeans there are.

(*Iliad* 9.624-42)

The rhetorical mastery and large-scale exhibitions employed by Odysseus and Phoenix are absent from this speech, and Ajax addresses Achilles in a more overtly reproachful manner (αἰδέσσει, 9.640) and tone than his fellow ambassadors dare to attempt. The obdurate Ajax, perhaps, recognizes implacability when he sees it and finds no purpose in pressing the inexorable Achilles. However, Ajax cannot resist a parting shot and once again makes explicit reference to the bonds of friendship and shared concern (φιλότιτος, 9.430) that unite the Greek army. Just as in his motivations to the wavering host in book 15, by specifically addressing Achilles’ disregard for his *philo* Ajax reinforces and reiterates the notion that each soldier is reliant upon his brothers in arms, and vice versa (9.640-1). Although Ajax refuses to conform his speech in this scene to the more typical style of his co-ambassadors, Achilles is moved more by Ajax than he is by Odysseus or Phoenix (9.645), though not enough to cease from his grudge. In fact, Ajax’s ability to speak to Achilles’ more martial side may explain Nestor’s suggestion that he be included in the embassy, in spite of his general reluctance to speak. This scene,

coupled with the speeches from books 7 and 15 discussed above, define very well Ajax's mode of speech in the *Iliad*: his words are few, but delivered with tremendous force and often to positive effect.

Likewise, Ajax's brief appearance in the *Odyssey* has a resounding effect upon Odysseus as these features of his speech—or lack thereof—are taken to their extreme. In his sole appearance in the *Odyssey*, Ajax displays his resolute reluctance to speak more than at any locus in the *Iliad*. Ajax, enraged even in death at Odysseus for cheating him of the arms of Achilles that should have been his, refuses to respond to the entreaties of Odysseus:

οἷη δ' Αἴαντος ψυχὴ Τελαμωνιάδαο
νόσφιν ἀφεστήκει, κεχολωμένη εἵνεκα νίκης
...
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν ἐπέεσσι προσηύδων μειλιχίοισιν·
'Αἴαν, παῖ Τελαμῶνος ἀμύμονος, οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλες
οὐδὲ θανῶν λήσεσθαι ἐμοὶ χόλου εἵνεκα τευχέων
οὐλομένων; τὰ δὲ πῆμα θεοὶ θέσαν Ἀργείοισι·
τοῖος γάρ σφιν πύργος ἀπώλεο· σεῖο δ' Ἀχαιοὶ
ἴσον Ἀχιλλῆος κεφαλῇ Πηληϊάδαο
ἀχνύμεθα φθιμένοιο διαμπερές· οὐδέ τις ἄλλος
αἴτιος, ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς Δαναῶν στρατὸν αἰχμητῶν
ἐκπάγλως ἤχθηρε, τεῖν δ' ἐπὶ μοῖραν ἔθηκεν.
ἀλλ' ἄγε δεῦρο, ἄναξ, ἴν' ἔπος καὶ μῦθον ἀκούσης
ἡμέτερον· δάμασον δὲ μένος καὶ ἀγήνορα θυμόν.'

And the solitary shade of Telamonian Ajax
stood apart, enraged because of my victory

...
I addressed him with honied words:
“Ajax, son of excellent Telamon, do you
even in death intend to hide from me on account of anger over losing
the armor? The gods set down these woes for the Argives:
for you, our tower, were destroyed by them. And we Achaeans,
equally to the life of Achilles son of Pelius,
ceaselessly mourn you having passed away. Nor is anyone else to
blame, but Zeus (who) hated terribly the army
of Greek spearmen, and he set down your fate.
But come hither, lord, so that you hear my word and speech:
restrain your wrath and control your spirit.”

(*Odyssey* 11.543-45, 552-62)

Although at first appearance this conflict seems a touch one-sided and perhaps even unresolved, it is charged with a kind of ideological energy that resonated powerfully with ancient authors. Beyond the lost works of the Epic Cycle that describe the contest for the arms of Achilles explicitly—the *Aethiopis* of Archinus of Miletus (c. 776 B.C.) and the *Little Iliad* commonly ascribed to Lesches of Pyrrha (c. 700 B.C.)¹⁰⁹—later authors either reflect or reimagine the conflict in ways that reveal the undercurrent of contention present in the scene.¹¹⁰

Upon closer inspection, it is possible to detect the elements that make this encounter resonate so powerfully. The first element is the presence of Odysseus' typical rhetorical strategy, discussed at length in an earlier section. Odysseus attempts to achieve reconciliation first by mollifying his bitter rival “with honied words” (ἐπέεσσι προσηύδων μελιχίοισιν, 552), and then by flattering him with the praise that he knows Ajax considers his just due (555-7). Thinking that this stratagem will lull Ajax into a receptive state, as it has for so many previous listeners, Odysseus attempts to escape culpability for Ajax's downfall by shifting the blame to Zeus (559-60). However, in perhaps the only instance in epic poetry where Odysseus' rhetorical strategy fails completely, Ajax is unmoved.

The second and more complex element in the scene that elicits so great an emotional gravity is Ajax's silent response. It is of critical importance that this silence is not misinterpreted as a rhetorical retreat. In stark contrast to the other shades that communicate freely with Odysseus, Ajax makes himself inaccessible to Odysseus' words

¹⁰⁹ Scholiast H on *Od.* 11.547 makes reference to these works (ἡ δὲ ἰστορία ἐκ τῶν κυκλικῶν). For further descriptions and dating details, see Davies (1989) 51-70.

¹¹⁰ Perhaps the most revealing of these is Virgil in the description of the encounter between Aeneas and Dido (*Aeneid* 6.450-76). For a more specific redeployment of the Odysseus/Ajax conflict, see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 13; Stanford (1954) 131-5, 139.

and in doing so disarms the clever-speaking Odysseus of his most functional tool. In fact, Ajax's refusal to respond to Odysseus' imprecations "has nothing to do with verbal impotence (*aglossa*); on the contrary, it reflects the hero's magnanimous soul."¹¹¹ That is, Ajax's aggressive silence is a speech act in its own right inasmuch as it conveys a message that could be imagined to be: "I'll not enter your arena, Odysseus. You'll not win another victory over me. You have no power if you lack a willing audience." Ironically, this "silent speech" is by far Ajax's most effective rhetorical encounter in Homeric epic. Not only is it successful in dismantling and nullifying the words of Homer's most effective speaker, but his failure places Odysseus in an uncomfortable and potentially damaging position in his narrative of the encounter to the Phaeacians, and he feels the need to skirt his shortcoming:

ἔνθα χ' ὄμως προσέφη κεχολωμένος, ἢ κεν ἐγὼ τόν·
 ἀλλά μοι ἤθελε θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισι
 τῶν ἄλλων ψυχὰς ἰδέειν κατατεθνηώτων.

And then yet he in his wrath would have spoken, or I to him:
 but my own heart in my chest longed
 to see the shades of the other dead.

(*Odyssey* 11.565-7)

Although it is possible to speculate that Odysseus' objective in this encounter is to lend credibility to his tale to the Phaeacians as a whole by demonstrating himself to be an imperfect speaker,¹¹² one thing is clear: just as Odysseus was able to negate Ajax's tremendous strength—the very foundation of his heroism—through the use of persuasive speech in the contest for the arms of Achilles, in this encounter Ajax temporarily dispossesses Odysseus of his rhetorical power and the heroic dignity that accompanies it.

¹¹¹ Montiglio (2000) 84; cf. also Longinus *On the Sublime* 9.2: "How marvelous is the great silence of Ajax in the Summoning of the Ghosts, more sublime than any speech."

¹¹² Montiglio (2000) 261. For a similar perspective on Odysseus' rhetorical strategy of feigned imperfection, see Segal (1994) 90.

Taken in its entirety, one might fairly describe the rhetorical character of Ajax in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* not as the embodiment of a singular rhetorical strategy (as is the case with more typical heroes such as Nestor, Odysseus, or Achilles), but rather in terms of a spectrum that moves from one extreme to the other. In the *Iliad* the thundering combat voice of Ajax that rouses the courage and impels the might of his fellow soldiers by means of its tone, volume, and appeal to bonds of *philia* (friendship, mutual protective concern) achieves a kind of persuasion that is not available to typical *peitho* (persuasion). Moreover, even in venues where *peitho* is unquestionably the proper rhetorical avenue for heroic *muthos* (public speech), Ajax retains a style of speaking that challenges his listeners to withstand its might, as opposed to mollifying their sympathies through calculated discourse. The Ajax of the *Odyssey* finds himself at the opposite extreme. Here, his ferocious silence functions as a speech act in its own right as Ajax articulates what lies implicit elsewhere in his encounters with other heroes: that there is power in silence as well.

Part IV: The Tragic Ajax

This, then, is the traditional epic figure of Ajax that is not only appropriated by Sophocles for tragic reinterpretation, but on a larger scale also becomes representative of Athens both through his Iliadic association with Menestheus and the Salamnian host sent to Troy and through cult worship that is contemporary to Sophocles' play.¹¹³ David Bradshaw notes that Ajax "would have been regarded as a protective *daimon* of the polis, a figure revealing an admirable balance of physical prowess and intellectual discretion, and, above all, a hero distinguished by his consistent espousal of the honor one secures and maintains through loyalty to one's allies."¹¹⁴ In the 440s, after the formal cessation of hostilities with Persia and with the necessity of Athens' prominence in the Delian League called into serious question, the Athenian polis increasingly finds itself in an ideological crisis: how can it maintain its power and status without violating the values that Ajax so notably represents? In the *Ajax* Sophocles investigates this dilemma on two levels, and he approaches both questions by the avenues of proper and improper speech. On one level, Sophocles explores the social and political consequences when allies that cannot afford disunity are not able or willing to express publicly their due courtesy. This conflict is instrumental not only in motivating Ajax's wrath at the opening of the play, but also in the agonistic contest over what should be done with his corpse. As Simon Goldhill notes, to this extent it is "not only the qualities of a hero that are questioned in Sophocles' *Ajax*, but also the petty wrangling of the contemporary arguments that follow a hero's

¹¹³ For Ajax's Iliadic association with Athens (possibly as a later interpolation), see Whitman (1958) 67-86. For ancient descriptions of the cult of Ajax and rituals dedicated to Ajax's son Eurysakes, see Pausanias (1.35.3 & 1.25.2) and Herodotus (6.35), and for the tradition that Eurysakes or his son Philaios were indoctrinated as Athenian citizens, see Plutarch (*Solon* 10). On these points see also Nagy (1979) 289; Bradshaw (1991) 114.

¹¹⁴ Bradshaw (1991) 115.

death.”¹¹⁵ On a second level, the play examines the ability of outside pressures to strain and even compromise the correct modes of speech that exist on a personal level between individuals, as is evident in the exchanges between Ajax, Tecmessa, and the choral sailors who are their companions. In each case, speech and public expression become equated with power in ways that reflect the disquieting concerns of a polis coming to the height of its power.

Perhaps the most extensive act of reception that Sophocles employs in his reimagining of the epic Ajax is his redeployment of the extremes of the rhetorical spectrum discussed above—from an overpowering combat voice to a vengeful, “speaking” silence—and extension of that spectrum beyond these boundaries to even more extravagant ends. First, in his exchange with Athena early in the play (91-117), Ajax lapses into *hubris* as he turns the commanding voice that holds such authoritarian sway over mortals against a goddess. Next, as Ajax comes to recognize the situation his folly has created, he is forced into a rhetorical situation with Tecmessa that is in some ways reminiscent of his role in the embassy to Achilles in book 9 of the *Iliad*. However, in a striking divergence from the epic character, the tragic Ajax is not able to retain his typical curtness and still make his point, but instead attempts to adopt an unfamiliar rhetorical strategy to navigate the situation. The result is the famous “deception scene” in which, as I shall demonstrate, Ajax speaks in a manner that makes use of marked sophistic rhetorical strategies and styles. Finally, Sophocles takes Ajax’s emotional “speaking silence” from his encounter with Odysseus in book 11 of the *Odyssey* to the greatest extreme possible, as for the majority of the play his corpse rests on stage, silently

¹¹⁵ Goldhill (1986) 77.

proclaiming the heroic ethos that, in a world where the values of *logos* and *ergon* have become inverted, died with him.

Madness and *Hubris*: Ajax and Athena

The divine madness that Athena casts over Ajax immediately preceding the opening of Sophocles' *Ajax* is twofold. In one sense it is a literal blindness (51-4), inasmuch as Ajax is literally not capable of distinguishing between the cattle that suffer the violence of his wrath (and in particular the animal bound inside his tent, which he understands to be Odysseus) and the leaders of the Achaean host who were his target. It is precisely this intended violence that leads to the revocation of Ajax's *kleos* by the Atreidae after his death and the contentious litigation over his corpse. However, Ajax is also afflicted by a more devastating blindness that inhibits his ability to act with the reverence that is due to the gods. That is, Athena has in the strictest sense infected Ajax with *atē*, a moral blindness that leads Ajax into *hubris* as he fails to distinguish between proper modes of speech between one mortal to another and between a mortal and a god.

Athena does not balk to display Ajax, whom she has “raved with a raging sickness” (φοιτῶντ' ἄνδρα μανιάσιν νόσοις, 59), to Odysseus as a didactic model for behavior that should be avoided at all costs. When Athena summons Ajax—ostensibly still blind to Odysseus' presence—from his tent to question him about his rampage, he addresses her at first in a tone that, although perhaps a touch familiar, is not overtly irreverent. In fact, he even offers recompense to her for the perceived success of his attack:

ὦ χαῖρ', Ἀθάνᾳ, χαῖρε, Διογενὲς τέκνον,
ὡς εὖ παρέστης καὶ σε παγχρύσοις ἐγὼ
στέψω λαφύροις τῆσδε τῆς ἄγρας χάριν.

Greetings, Athena, greetings, daughter of Zeus,
you stood well at my side. I shall crown your favor
with a prize of pure gold

(*Ajax* 91-3)

However, when Athena inquires into Ajax's plans for Odysseus and orders him specifically not to torture him, Ajax not only repudiates her command but has the audacity to issue her commands of his own:

- AΘ. Εἶεν· τί γὰρ δὴ παῖς ὁ τοῦ Λαερτίου
ποῦ σοι τύχης ἔστηκεν; ἢ πέφευγέ σε
...
ΑΙ. Πρὶν ἂν δεθῆς πρὸς κίον' ἔρκειου στέγης—
ΑΘ. Τί δήτα τὸν δύστηνον ἐργάση κακόν;
ΑΙ. Μάστιγι πρῶτον νῶτα φοινηχθεὶς θάνη
ΑΘ. Μὴ δήτα τὸν δύστηνον ὧδέ γ' αἰκίση
ΑΙ. Χαίρειν, Ἀθάννα, τᾶλλ' ἐγὼ σ' ἐφίεμαι,
κεῖνος δὲ τεῖσει τήνδε κοῦκ ἄλλην δίκην.
ΑΘ. Σὺ δ' οὔν, ἐπειδὴ τέρψις ἦδε σοι τὸ δρᾶν,
χρῶ χειρὶ, φείδου μηδὲν ὦνπερ ἐννοεῖς
ΑΙ. Χωρῶ πρὸς ἔργον, τοῦτό σοι δ' ἐφίεμαι,
τοιάνδ' αἰέ μοι σύμμαχον παρεστάναι.
- At. Very well. And what of the son of Laertes?
In what state was set? Did he escape?
Aj. First he shall be bound to a pillar beneath my roof—
At. What then will you do to the wretched man?
Aj. —and having made his back red with a whip, he would die.
At. No, do not torture the wretch this way.
Aj. I say, Athena, rejoice in all other things,
but this man will pay this penalty and none other.
At. Since it is a delight for you to do this,
put your hand to it, hesitate not at all.
Aj. I withdraw to my work, and I order this to you:
stand always as such an ally to me.

(*Ajax* 101-2, 108-17)

Ajax is well used to commanding soldiers in battle, and in fact it is at those points in his epic tradition where his speech is most effective. Here, however, he has enjoined a divinity in a manner that no mortal should. First, he bids Athena to “rejoice at all other things” (Χαίρειν, Ἀθάννα, τᾶλλ' ἐγὼ σ' ἐφίεμαι, 111)—perhaps a polite command, but a command nonetheless. Even further, he charges her to “be present always as my ally” (τοῦτό σοι δ' ἐφίεμαι,/ τοιάνδ' αἰέ μοι σύμμαχον παρεστάναι, 116), an even stronger

injunction than his previous one. It should be noted, however, that Athena is no innocent victim of Ajax's hubristic dialogue. Indeed, her capitulation and lack of immediate rebuke (114) goads Ajax ever further away from good sense.¹¹⁶

It is precisely the loss of Ajax's more typical good sense that lies at the head of his tragic situation. As we have seen, the notion of Ajax and his thundering voice that is so accustomed to issuing incontrovertible commands in the *Iliad* (and always to positive effect) colors his words in this passage with an authoritarian tone that perfectly suits the insane *hubris* into which Ajax has trespassed.¹¹⁷ But even more importantly, here Ajax has shown himself to be conspicuously devoid of the good sense praised by Hector in the *Iliad* as night brings an end to their duel in book 7:

Τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέειπε μέγας κορυθαίολος Ἴκτωρ
 Αἴαν ἐπεὶ τοι δῶκε θεὸς μέγεθός τε βίην τε
 καὶ πινυτήν, περὶ δ' ἔγχει Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατός ἐσσι,
 νῦν μὲν παυσώμεσθα μάχης καὶ δηϊοτήτος
 σήμερον·

And then great shining-helmed Hector addressed him:
 "Ajax, a god granted you stature and might
 and good sense, and with a spear you are the best of the Achaeans,
 so now let us cease from battle and combat
 for the day."

(*Iliad* 7.288-91)

It is of critical importance that in his encounter with Athena, Ajax displays the loss of this good sense by means of a misguided and improperly conceived speech act.

Considering the inherent link that joins the prudent values associated with

*sophrosune*¹¹⁸—the very aspects of mental self-control, poise, and balance that Ajax so

¹¹⁶ Blundell (1989) 65; Kennedy (2000) 115. See Scodel (2005) 245 for the perspective that having a goddess begin the action of a play instead of ending it creates an atmosphere of inversion that permeates the entire performance.

¹¹⁷ Jebb (2004) 28 n.112.

¹¹⁸ North (1966) 59 notes that although the noun *sophrosune* does not appear anywhere in Sophocles, its cognates are more prominent in the *Ajax* than in any other extant tragedy. See also Blundell (1989) 61 n.6; Stanford (1954) 132.

conspicuously lacks here in the drama—to the ability to speak properly and effectively, it comes as little surprise that the loss of clear thought precedes erroneous speech. What is striking is the extent to which, even after the attempted slaughter of his comrades, Ajax’s loss of *sophrosune* and use of impertinent speech places him fundamentally at odds with the Achaean host. This incompatibility is drawn into even sharper focus when one recalls that the motivating force in several of his battlefield exhortations in the *Iliad* made explicit reference to the service that each soldier owes to the host. As Goldhill notes, this is the key ethical disconnection that propels the tragedy:

As we shall see, the play seems to focus on Ajax’s inability to fit into social norms, his inability to subsume his self to the hierarchy and order of the world and of the army. What I wish to stress here is that this tension between the hero and the surrounding society is constructed *through the language of a primarily fifth-century ethical interest*—and one which reflects the democratic ideology of commitment and involvement in the social life of the city. There develops with regard to a certain sort of attitude to living in the democratic city a new emphasis on the value of terms such as *sophronein*.¹¹⁹

At the core of this ethical interest and the democratic ideology that serves as its foundation is the necessity for civic speech to function as the primary medium by which the citizen body participates in and perpetuates a functioning *polis*; at the point that civic speech breaks down, so too does the operation of the Athenian state.

(Un)Adaptability and Persuasive Speech

Consistent with his Homeric persona, we find in the opening speeches of Sophocles’ *Ajax* a hero who is quite accustomed to giving orders, and as we have seen the dramatist presents in this play an Ajax whose authoritarian speech is taken to an even greater extreme. From this point, however, the speech of Ajax begins a shift away from this extreme and toward its opposite—a “speaking silence” not unlike that of Ajax in

¹¹⁹ Goldhill (1986) 146; emphases are my own.

book 11 of the *Odyssey*. As Athena's divine madness subsides and Ajax regains a more sober awareness of his situation, his speech undergoes conspicuous changes as it transitions from one extreme to the other. After the return to his more reticent self and upon his decision that noble suicide is his only remaining option, Ajax embarks upon a rhetorical endeavor that is a tremendous departure from any of his speeches in epic poetry. As we shall see, his misleading description of his intentions to Tecmessa—the much discussed “deception speech”—not only attempts a type of persuasion more familiar to the speeches of Odysseus, but employs rhetorical strategies that are commonly associated with sophistic language. Although the phenomenon of sophistry was rather young at the time of the play's performance in the early 440s,¹²⁰ through Ajax's use of the sophistic method it is possible to detect the beginnings of a civic anxiety over the power of speech that finds even greater voice in later tragedy.

In the wake of Ajax's realization of his mistaken onslaught against the cattle, he sits brooding and despondent in his tent as Tecmessa provides a lengthy description of the previous night's events to the chorus (284-330). The only remark from Ajax that she quotes directly, uttered in response to her questioning his purpose in leaving the tent in the middle of the night, offers familiar insight into Ajax's attitude toward speech: “But he spoke forceful things to me, and as always trite: ‘Woman, silence confers grace upon a woman’” (‘Ο δ’ εἶπε πρὸς με βάλ’, ἀεὶ δ’ ὑμνούμενα/ Γύναι, γυναιξὶ κόσμον ἢ σιγὴ φέρει, 292-3).¹²¹ This too is the voice of the melancholy Ajax who is revealed from within his tent as Tecmessa concludes her narration, the very one to whom Tecmessa mistakenly

¹²⁰ Most scholars follow Jebb (2004) 53 in accepting this dating for the play's performance based on metrical and stylistic analysis; for a different perspective see Kennedy (2009) 113, who based on Sophocles' intentionally divergent manner of presenting Athena dates the play shortly after the onset of the Peloponnesian War.

¹²¹ Montiglio (2000) 227.

applies the gnomic adage that “men in his state can be won by the words of friends (330).” It is at this point that Ajax first announces his longing to die and, ironically, to kill Odysseus and the Atreidae in the process (387-91)—his attempt at which created the necessity for suicide in the first place. It is particularly important that neither here nor in his more explicit consideration of his situation (394-409, 411-27) does he mince words about his intentions: “But no more (will you know) me, not still having life: let some sound man know this” (ἀλλ’ οὐκέτι μ’, οὐκέτ’ ἀμπνοᾶς/ ἔχοντα· τοῦτό τις φρονῶν ἴστω, 416-7). Suicide is his only option, he says, because his disgrace is unbearable and his death in battle would surely benefit those Greeks whom he now longs to destroy (457-80).

As a response to this disclosure of Ajax’s intentions and his reasoning for deciding upon it, Tecmessa passionately pleads her case that Ajax not go through with his plan. In fact, the failure of her persuasion in spite of the tremendous merit of her argument lends keen insight into Ajax’s disposition at this point toward not only his obligations to his *philoī*, but concerning proper modes of communication between them. Tecmessa begins by underscoring that through marriage she is *philos* to Ajax, and as such she entreats him by invoking “the Zeus of our hearth” (ἔφεστίου Διὸς, 492) not to doom her “to the cruel rumor of thy foes” (βάξιν ἀλγεινήν...τῶν σῶν ὑπ’ ἐχθρῶν, 494-5). Even at this early stage the two-fold strategy of Tecmessa’s appeal is clear. On one front, throughout her speech she attempts to appeal to what remains of Ajax’s sense of duty to his *philoī*. Even beyond herself, she asks him to consider the devastating sorrow that will befall his father (506), his mother (507), and his young son that will surely fall to the hands of some cruel guardian (510-1). Given the strong sense of duty and devotion to the

welfare of the Greek army that Ajax displays at many points in the *Iliad*, her appeal to consider the dire implications his death holds for these *philoï* seems the correct tactic, though quite notably in this case the roster of Ajax's *philoï* has changed. Her assertion might be summarized that although his martial *philoï* and the mutual obligations that surround them have been nullified, there remains to him familial *philoï* that are reliant upon his duty to them.¹²²

The second approach of Tecmessa's attempted persuasion appeals directly to Ajax's sense of *kleos*, and specifically to the ways in which the words of praise that should have honored him will allow the speech of his enemies to continue to attack him when he is dead. Tecmessa imagines the insults she will endure when she becomes the slave of some new master upon Ajax's death: "Do you see Ajax's concubine, he who was the mightiest of the army, do you see what base tasks she endures, she who once rejoiced (501-3)?" Though leveled at her, Tecmessa argues that these insults convey the greater dishonor upon him (505), effectively obliterating the *kleos* he sought with such valor.¹²³ Especially considering the attack that Odysseus recently brought upon his *kleos* in the contest for the arms of Achilles, and the fact that in this attack Odysseus assailed this *kleos* with speech—the one weapon against which Ajax has no defense—one might expect the anticipated defamation his honor would surely endure after his death to be the most persuasive argument one could pose to Ajax.

Tecmessa's speech to Ajax ends once with a further appeal to consider her fate without him ("On you all my welfare depends," 519), giving the address a lovely ring

¹²² See Goldhill (1986) 86 and Blundell (1989) 77 on the interconnection between familial and martial obligations, most notably between Hector and Andromache at *Iliad* 6.464. Blundell also considers this a strong way for Tecmessa to frame her argument, given Ajax's "anxiety for parental approval (76)."

¹²³ For the image of the implicit shame that befalls a wife surviving a hero's death, see Hector and Andromache at *Iliad* 6.454-63. See also Nagy (1979) 94-5.

composition¹²⁴ that, alongside its reasonable and well-articulated argument, marks it as a rhetorically sound act of persuasion. However, it is precisely this speech's failure in spite of its merits to deter Ajax from his purpose that reveals the extent to which he has been removed from a civic world that allows for and is in fact predicated upon open lines of communication between well-thinking speakers and listeners. With these lines of communication severed, Ajax finds himself entirely isolated from responsibility to anything but his own ideology.¹²⁵ Furthermore, in his refusal to entertain Tecmessa's arguments, Ajax shows a conspicuous lack of the "good sense" for which Hector praised him in the *Iliad*. It is at this point that the greater part of Ajax's Iliadic persona and all that made him so invaluable to the Achaean war effort has been abandoned, and all that remains is a self-serving obduracy that is committed to its own end.

Sophistry and the Deception Speech

Following his dismissal of Tecmessa's speech, Ajax retires into his tent while the chorus sings a joyous interlude that imagines the celebration that awaits Ajax upon his return to Salamis. The Ajax who then emerges from the tent, however, is one that has been a puzzling source of scholarly discussion for decades.¹²⁶ The majority of these interpretative efforts have focused on the cause of this astonishing reversal and the reasons that Ajax not only speaks in such a deceitful manner, but also seems to have embraced the values that he so recently scorned—the mutability of friendship, the

¹²⁴ Tecmessa's speech is structured in a manner very similar to that of Odysseus to Achilles as he reports Agamemnon's offer of gifts in book 9 of the *Iliad*. See above for a description of the ring composition that is common to both.

¹²⁵ Buxton (1982) 117.

¹²⁶ For a detailed survey of interpretations of this scene see Errandonea (1958) 24-8; see also Winnington-Ingram (1980) 47; Segal (1981) 423.

necessary bonds of *philia*, the power of the gods, etc. As this is a study that is primarily interested in speech, I do not wish to dwell on these issues other than to note that at this point Ajax has been overtaken by the forces of change in the heroic ethos that he has so vehemently resisted; just as his suicide is a rejection of the new order of *kleos*—one where *logos* has superseded *ergon*—his deceptive language represents an unwillingness to continue his resistance against those who would attempt to gain through rhetorical dexterity what he achieved through martial prowess.

More important to this study is the question of why Sophocles chose to present this particular kind of speech on the lips of Ajax and what elements of this speech resonate most closely with the play's audience. It is important to note that this audience of (mostly) Athenian citizens made use of and were audience to rhetorical displays every day that they participated in the public life of the *polis*.¹²⁷ This experience would presumably have granted them a keen ear for the specific rhetorical ticks that are present in Ajax's deception speech, ones that are underscored because they are spoken from the mouth of Homer's least likely rhetorical stylist. As we shall see, upon close inspection of Ajax's speech it is possible to detect elements of sophistic style in his language. This suggests that far from committing a simple act of *dolos* that will allow him to sneak away and commit his final act, his deception speech represents a willful—or, from a different perspective, unwilling—rhetorical performance.

Although the phenomenon of sophistry was in its very early stages at the time of the play's performance in the late 440s,¹²⁸ the play suggests the rumblings of an anxiety

¹²⁷ See Allan (2008) 4-6 for a discussion on tragedy's use of reference to the civic experience of its audience to create a dialectic that can criticize or affirm civic ideology.

¹²⁸ Gorgias of Leontini, sophistry's first superstar, does not arrive in Athens until 427 and the movement reaches the height of its influence in the events leading up to the brief oligarchic revolution of 411.

not only over the growing power of calculated speech but over the shifting meanings of words. Thucydides vividly describes a similar anxiety that spreads across many *poleis* across Greece as conflicts escalated between pro-Athenian democratic and pro-Spartan oligarchic factions in the early stages of the Peloponnesian War.¹²⁹ In particular, in his description of Corcyrean Revolution and the panic that erupted in Corcyra at the news of the approaching Athenian forces Thucydides considers the capacity for war to alter or destroy the normal conventions of civilized behavior:¹³⁰

ἔστασίαζέ τε οὖν τὰ τῶν πόλεων, καὶ τὰ ἐφυστερίζοντά που πύσσει τῶν προγενομένων πολὺ ἐπέφερε τὴν ὑπερβολὴν τοῦ καινοῦσθαι τὰς διανοίας τῶν τ' ἐπιχειρήσεων περιτεχνήσει καὶ τῶν τιμωριῶν ἀτοπία. καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιώσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιτος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθῆς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἀργόν·

And then these (revolutions) were erupting from city to city, and whatever places where it arrived later, by hearing what had been done before, increased to excess the advancement of their purposes, by the extraordinary cunning of their attacks and the unprecedented nature of their vengeance. And the customary meaning of words, too, changed to fit now what is considered just. Thoughtless aggression was considered the courage of a faithful ally; prudent caution, specious cowardice; moderation a disguise for unmanliness; the thorough consideration of a thing the inability to act.

(*Historiae* III.82.3-4)

Even if the power of speech to reassign values to their polar opposites, as Thucydides describes here, has not reached its wartime apex at the time when Ajax's deception speech was performed, the political and civic atmosphere where such a shift could take place was becoming apparent. The playwright identifies opposing attitudes in his audience concerning the influence of rhetorical power over a variety of functions in the polis and attempts to think through the merits of each camp. We might imagine on one side of this conflict audience members who see great value in rhetorical dexterity and

¹²⁹ Finley (1967) 33. Finley also notes similar parallels in the plays of Euripides (especially *Ion* 1045-47 and *Electra* 376).

¹³⁰ Cartwright (1997) 157.

understand that the political reality of fifth-century Athens equates speech and power. On the other side we might imagine a more conservative element that, like Ajax, assigns ultimate value to a citizen's deeds and is mistrustful of those who would instead attempt to direct the minds of their countrymen through speech. As a wordsmith by trade, Sophocles had a major stake in this debate and the presence of marked sophistic language in the deception speech attempts to find middle ground between the two factions.

The sophistic strategy that Ajax applies to this speech is almost Odyssean in its intentional duplicity. In direct contrast to the more traditional use of the brute force of his voice to affect his listeners, here Ajax capitulates to the new values of rhetoric shared by his fellow Achaeans and speaks with a shrewd and almost poetic ambiguity that creates space for multiple interpretations of his words.¹³¹ Ajax opens his parting speech with an enigmatic admission, noting that Tecmessa's pleading for him to consider the fate of the family he will leave behind had an impact on him, and he allows his listeners to believe that he has been persuaded:

Ἄλλ' εἶμι πρὸς τε λουτρὰ καὶ παρακτίους
 λειμῶνας, ὡς ἂν λύμαθ' ἀγνίσας ἐμὰ
 μῆνιν βαρεῖαν ἐξαλύξωμαι θεᾶς
 μολῶν τε χώρον ἔνθ' ἂν ἀστιβῆ κίχῳ,
 κρύψω τόδ' ἔγχος τοῦμόν, ἔχθιστον βελῶν,
 γαίᾳς ὀρύξας ἔνθα μή τις ὄψεται
 ἀλλ' αὐτὸ νύξ' Αἰδῆς τε σωζόντων κάτω.

I will go to the baths and meadows
 by the shore, that in cleansing my stains
 I might flee the grievous anger of the goddess.
 And going there I will seek an untrodden spot,
 I will bury this sword, most hateful of weapons,
 in the earth where none shall see:
 Let Night and Hades keep it underground.

(*Ajax* 654-660)

¹³¹ Heath (1987) 186-7.

As the audience knows, these actions will come to pass in a manner quite different than the one Ajax has indicated, though strictly speaking, he has told no lies. He will indeed go to the bathing place at the shore's edge and cleanse himself. However, where Tecmessa understands λύματα to be the physical gore that still clings to Ajax's body, it is clear that he actually speaks of a spiritual miasma that can only be cleansed with death. Further, Ajax will also "bury" the black sword of Hector, though not in the way implied. Here his specific language is even more intentionally ambiguous, perhaps with an intentional pun. The verb κρύψω can certainly be read as "I shall bury," but he is also in fact "hiding" something as well, the word's more common shade of meaning. This contrasts sharply with Teucer's description of the same action later at line 897-8: "Here lies Ajax, just now freshly slain,/ fallen upon a secret sword" (Αἴας ὄδ' ἡμῖν ἀρτίως νεοσφαγῆς,/ κέϊται κρυφαίῳ φασγάνῳ περιπτυχίῃς). Where the audience understood Ajax's intent, Teucer's description serves to unshroud and make explicit the ambiguity of Ajax's earlier words to the other characters on stage.

While these cunning words signify a major departure from Ajax's more typical candor, a series of statements follow where Ajax in his speech employs an even more overtly sophistic rhetorical practice. At line 666 he ponders the lesson his disgraceful rampage has taught him, and even beyond creating a tactful ambiguity in his language, he willfully shifts the meanings of words to guide more subtly his audience's thinking:

Τοιγὰρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσόμμεθα μὲν θεοῖς
εἶκειν, μαθησόμεσθα δ' Ἀτρεΐδας σέβειν
I shall know to submit to the gods,
and to worship the Atreidae.

(*Ajax* 666-7)

Key to the interpretation of this deceptively simple statement is a sort of ironic tension that Sophocles has interwoven between the infinitives εἶκειν, “to yield, submit, follow” and σέβειν, “to worship.” Ajax acknowledges that the relationship he formerly had with the gods and with the Atreidae has become inverted in the wake of the revaluation of *logos* and *ergon*. That is, Ajax formerly worshiped the gods and operated under the system of *kleos* that they (at least implicitly) endorsed, and he performed his martial exploits under the command of the Atreidae. He now find himself in an inverted situation—the Atreidae and Odysseus dictate the system by which honor and *gerata* are awarded, and Athena is the one who determines who (or what) finds itself at the end of Ajax’s spear.

Members of the fifth-century audience who were familiar with civic language would likely have detected this subtle shift in the meaning of Ajax’s words, a technique that soon after the play’s production became a mark of high sophistic style. One thinks immediately of the masterful use of this technique employed by wily writers like Gorgias or Isocrates, who in expository works such as *The Encomium of Helen* or *The Defense of Palamedes* explore the nature of the power that speech can wield. Gorgias in particular is renowned for a very silimilar rhetorical strategy that Sophocles engenders in Ajax’s deception speech, one that stretches and shifts the meanings of words:

αἱ γὰρ ἔνθεοι διὰ λόγων ἐπωδαὶ ἐπαγωγοὶ ἡδονῆς, ἀπαγωγοὶ λύπης γίνονται· συγγινομένη γὰρ τῇ δόξει τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ δύναμις τῆς ἐπωδῆς ἔθελε καὶ ἔπεισε καὶ μετέστησεν αὐτὴν γοητεῖᾶ. γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχνη εὕρηται, αἱ εἰσι ψυχῆς ἀμαρτήματα καὶ δόξης ἀπατήματα.

Sacred incantations sung with words are bearers of pleasure and banishers of pain: for, merging with opinion in the soul, the power of the incantation is wont to beguile it and persuade it and alter it by witchcraft. There have been discovered two arts of witchcraft and magic: one consists of errors of soul and the other of deceptions of opinion.

(*Encomium of Helen*, 10)

This excerpt provides just one example of Gorgias' skill at weaving a simple idea into a complex statement. As in Ajax's meditation on the gods and the Atreidae noted above, Gorgias structures his thought around words strategically chosen for their oppositional semantics and assonant jingle. The sonic qualities of these words make it a simple matter to gloss over their meaning without careful consideration. Although the difference in sound between ἐπαγωγὸι and ἀπαγωγὸι is slight, the difference in meaning is vast: it appears Gorgias would have his listeners believe that to induce pleasure and to remove pain are equivalent actions. Likewise, Gorgias asks his listener to consider the difference between "errors of the soul" and "deceptions of opinion," ἀμαρτήματα vs. ἀπατήματα, with words of such similar sonic quality and such variety in their shades of meaning that they could easily be interchanged without tremendous loss to the point Gorgias is striving for. With artful subtlety, Gorgias has maneuvered his argument in such a way that in understanding his meaning his audience accepts the meanings of his words exactly as he has chosen to render them.

It is perhaps easy to see from this artfully rendered exploration of the power of cunning speech how the sophists came to be viewed with such distrust, and the conflict between honest persuasion and dexterous rhetoric that it hints at may in part explain Sophocles' interest in the Ajax saga. In fact, in his carefully rendered presentation of the Athenian hero in a venue that looks so closely at civic ideology, Sophocles finds common ground between the rhetorically progressive and conservative factions described above, especially when one recalls the recognitions experienced by Odysseus in the same play discussed in an earlier section. Odysseus and Ajax, heroes who at the play's opening are representative of the polarized values of *logos* and *ergon*, both experience shifts toward

moderation. In employing such cunning speech in his parting address to Tecmessa, Ajax implicitly acknowledges the value and utility of dexterous language. Likewise, in spite of the fierce enmity between them by the play's closing lines, Odysseus is fully prepared to bestow upon Ajax the title of "the best of the Argives...after Achilles" (ἄριστον Ἀργείων... πλὴν Ἀχιλλέως, 1340) specifically because of his martial exploits. Even in a system where the extremes of *logos* and *ergon* have experienced so tremendous a shift in value, there remains space for excellence in either or both.

"Silent Speech"

Ajax's suicide and the permanent silence that accompanies it reside at the opposite extreme of the rhetorical spectrum from his frenzied and hubristic discourse with Athena at the opening of the play. Just as Sophocles has expanded Ajax's thundering Iliadic voice to such an extreme that it would be misdirected at a divine figure, here too he expands the notion of Ajax's wrathful "speaking silence" in his encounter with Odysseus in book 11 of the *Odyssey*. More so even than the physical and verbal distance that Ajax creates between himself and Odysseus in Homer by his refusal to engage in speech, Sophocles' Ajax renders himself physically incapable of verbal intercourse—the ultimate categorical rejection of the ethos of *logos* and his ideological exit from human society.¹³² The rejection that the silence of Ajax's corpse performs resounds through the theater for the remainder of the play and at every point colors the

¹³² Montiglio (2000) 227.

intense exchanges between Teucer (who, as indicated at 565-72, is to act as Ajax's proxy) and the Atreidae, the antagonistic center of the play.¹³³

The notion of the "speaking silence" of Ajax's corpse as a sustained and deliberate performance is reinforced by its conspicuous breaking with dramatic convention at two important points.¹³⁴ First, the hyper-masculinity of Ajax is juxtaposed against the act of suicide itself, which, as discussed at length by Nicole Loraux, is an act that on the tragic stage is strongly marked as feminine. Tragedy abounds with female suicides—Jocasta and Antigone, Deianira, Eurydice, Phaedra, and Leda—most of which come at the end of a rope and thereby bear the mark of a shameful retreat from "irremediable dishonor."¹³⁵ Haemon's suicide—the only other male suicide in extant tragedy—is also styled as an escape as he succumbs to an irreconcilable conflict between wife and father where death is revealed the only option.¹³⁶ In direct contrast to these, Ajax's suicide is not only self-determined but also retains a portion of the nobility granted by a heroic death:

Even suicide in tragedy obeys this firm rule, that a man must die by a man's hand, by a sword and with blood spilt. In Sophocles, as in Pindar, Ajax kills himself by the sword, faithful until the end to his status as a hero who lives and dies in war, where wounds are given and received in an exchange that, on a whole, is subject to rules. Pierced by the blade with which he identifies himself (*Ajax* 650-1), he tears open his side on the sword that, in *staging* his own death, he makes into an *actor*: "The killer (*sphageus*) is there," he says, "standing upright so he can slice as cleanly as possible."¹³⁷

As Loraux keenly observes here, Ajax's act of suicide contains a strong performative element that is lacking in the suicides of other tragic characters, one whose message is clear: if Ajax is the last of the heroes who will abide by the ethos of *kleos*, he is the only

¹³³ Jebb (1898) 45 imagines the suspense that arises from the juxtaposition between the movement and agitation of the litigants at stage front and the silence and stillness of Ajax, Tecmessa, and Eurysaces in the background.

¹³⁴ See Wiles (2007) 92-104 on the dramatic conventions of Greek tragedy.

¹³⁵ Loraux (1987) 4, 8, 71 n.4.

¹³⁶ Blundell (1989) 137-8.

¹³⁷ Loraux (1987) 12; emphases are my own.

one who can rightfully engage in the death-for-honor exchange noted by Loraux, and he can leave it to no other man to take his life or his honor.

This death performance and the message it entails leads directly to the second break with dramatic convention that Sophocles included in the play: the on-stage violence of Ajax's death and the continued presence, and thus performance, of his lifeless body. Significantly, the scene shifts from Ajax's tent to a private—but not hidden—location on the beach where he can commit his final act. In stark contrast to other tragic suicides that take place off stage and that express a private anguish that is specifically hidden from view,¹³⁸ Ajax leaves his body in a public place and thereby forces his death performance into the gaze of not only the Greek kings but also the tragic audience. In doing so, he grants his sustained presence on stage a silent but speaking voice that is similar to the one granted to Phaedra by the message contained in the *deltos* left pinned to her body (*Hippolytos* 865-86).¹³⁹ In both cases, the dead have committed a final, permanent, and silent speech act that from the grave exerts heavy influence over the remainder of the drama. In the *Ajax*, the performative silence of the dead hero continually asserts his rejection of the ethos of *logos* and as a public act forces the living Achaean heroes and the audience of the tragedy to acknowledge the loss of the ethos of *kleos*.

Ajax's silent speech here is strongly reminiscent of his reproachful presence in the *Odyssey* and it looms over the remaining rhetorical performances of the play. It is perhaps felt most strongly in the authority it lends to Teucer as he fights for the honorable burial of his brother. These arguments between Teucer and the Atreidae and the contribution made by the silent speech of Ajax is worth examining as more than a series

¹³⁸ Loraux (1987) 21.

¹³⁹ See Zeitlin (1996) 245.

of agonistic contests; it is also a contest over the proper civic expression that needs to be made toward the corpse and the memory of the fallen hero. Although the ostensible source of the conflict is the order of the Atreidae to leave the body unburied as a feast for the carrion beasts—the greatest maltreatment they could level at Ajax and what remains of his *kleos* (1065)—and Teucer’s refusal to allow his brother’s corpse to suffer such defamation,¹⁴⁰ on a broader level the contest wrestles with the same ideological question that Ajax was so unwilling to consider: what place for his more traditional values of *logos* and *ergon* remains in a system that has seen their inversion?

Significantly, with Teucer as its speaking agent the “speaking silence” of Ajax erodes and finally negates the command—and by extension the verbal authority—of the Atreidae.¹⁴¹ In doing so, Ajax in death scores the victory over the commanders of the Achaean host that he was not able to achieve in life. The first small victory in Ajax’s vengeance comes against Menelaus, who relishes the opportunity to vaunt his authority over Ajax now allowed by the revaluation of *logos* and *ergon*:

εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ ἄδυνήθημεν κρατεῖν,
 πάντως θανόντος γ’ ἄρξομεν, κἄν μὴ θέλῃς,
 χερσὶν παρευθύνοντες· οὐ γὰρ ἔσθ’ ὅπου
 λόγων ἀκοῦσαι ζῶν ποτ’ ἠθέλησ’ ἐμῶν.

For if we were not able control him while living,
 at least we shall rule him entirely in death—even if you don’t will it—
 constraining him with our hands; for while he lived
 never did he desire to listen to my words.

(*Ajax* 1067-70)

Teucer is successful in rebuking this haughtiness and driving a sheepish Menelaus off by combining rhetorical and physical skills in a way that Ajax could not. He first

¹⁴⁰ Scodel (1993) 12-14 discusses at length the specific funerary rituals that are due to Ajax and the necessity that they be administered to the figure that is, after all, the center of an important Athenian hero cult.

¹⁴¹ Burnett (1998) 80.

systematically dissolves any notions of authority that Menelaus believes he hold over Ajax, noting that Ajax came to Troy under the command of no man, and Menelaus least of all (1098); Menelaus, on the other hand, sailed under the command of Agamemnon and as such should kneel before the authority of a free king such as Ajax (1105-6). Indeed, what right does Menelaus have to dictate the terms of Ajax’s funerary rituals (1100)? When Menelaus scoffs at this reasoning as the rhetorical maneuverings of a cowardly bowman (1142-1149), Teucer responds in no uncertain terms with the threat of force—a tactic that Ajax would understand well: “Man, do not act badly toward the dead. For if you will, you shall know great harm” (Ὠνθρωπε, μὴ δρᾶ τοὺς τεθνηκότας κακῶς/ εἰ γὰρ ποιήσεις, ἴσθι πημανούμενος, 1154-5).¹⁴² To this warning of violence, Menelaus makes a gruff reply and quickly departs. So much for the authority of Menelaus.

Teucer is less successful in his agonistic encounter with Agamemnon, but as noted above he receives critical help from Odysseus just as the argument comes to an impasse. What is most significant about this encounter is the more explicit manner in which Agamemnon alludes to and attempts to justify the revaluation of word and deed—the very system that the continued presence of the corpse of Ajax vehemently rejects. Agamemnon mocks Ajax’s wrath and the notion that those defeated in an argument would attempt to seek vengeance in any way:

Ἐκ τῶνδε μέντοι τῶν τρόπων οὐκ ἄν ποτε
κατάστασις γένοιτ’ ἄν οὐδενὸς νόμου,
εἰ τοὺς δίκη νικῶντας ἐξωθήσομεν
καὶ τοὺς ὀπισθεν εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν ἄξομεν.
Ἄλλ’ εἰρκτέον τάδ’ ἐστίν· οὐ γὰρ οἱ πλατεῖς
οὐδ’ εὐρύνωτοι φῶτες ἀσφαλέστατοι,
ἀλλ’ οἱ φρονοῦντες εὐ κρατοῦσι πανταχοῦ.

¹⁴² Scodel (2005) 244 notes that as Teucer’s anger grows in this encounter he throws “pseudo-fables” at Menelaus, as if he were unworthy of engaging in productive speech—a mentality that Ajax surely would have shared.

For such ways being the case, not ever
 would there be an establishment of any law,
 if in judgment we will thrust aside the victors
 and lead those in the rear forward.
 No, rather these things are to be prevented. For not stout,
 broad-shouldered and steadfast men,
 but those thinking well are in all ways superior.

(*Ajax* 1246-53)

The new civic order, as described here by Agamemnon, offers specific advantage to those who think well (οἱ φρονοῦντες εὖ, 1253) and by extension speak well, and nowhere else in the play is it more clear that there is no room in this order for Ajax. Teucer takes the same stance in his response to Agamemnon as he did to Menelaus; he cites the many deeds that Ajax performed for the Greek host and the many times he protected Agamemnon himself (1266-89), thereby once again calling the grounds of the authority of the Atreidae into serious question. The difference in this encounter, however, is that when Teucer threatens violence against Agamemnon, that “wherever you cast this man (Ajax), so too will you cast our three corpses (1309),” there is little reason to doubt that Agamemnon would have granted Teucer his wish if it were not for the timely intercession of Odysseus.

With these two *agones* between Teucer and the Atreidae over the fallen corpse of Ajax and the traditional system of *kleos* that he championed in mind, what dramatic or rhetorical contribution is made by the “speaking silence” of Ajax? What it reveals, writes Anne Burnett, “is not a tableau of failure and madness; for what is actually displayed is the revenger Ajax as he would have been, if only he had been allowed to keep his normal eyesight.”¹⁴³ As we have seen, it is the most forceful rejection of the civic order that promotes the value of *logos* over *ergon* that Ajax can possibly muster. “Never,” we can

¹⁴³ Burnett (1998) 81.

imagine the voice of the speaking silence, “so long as there are noble men, will unchecked speech conquer deed or justly deprive the valorous of their *kleos*.” Even if the *ergon* system of *kleos* has become antiquated, Ajax’s vengeance is completed by the failure of the *logos* system to dictate the terms of his funerary rituals; and true to his inflexible persona, in achieving this vengeance Ajax prefers to break before he will bend. The conflict that arises between these two ideologies nearly spills into exactly the kind of civic violence that was so recently curbed only by Athena’s intervention, and we see yet again that both are too extreme to create and maintain stability within the Achaean host—or, for that matter, the Athenian *polis*.

Conclusion

Sophocles’ rendering of the Ajax saga and the issues it specifically addresses comes at a time when the Athenian *polis* would have been forced to consider the values that are taken to extremes in the play. As the city reached the apex of its power before the onset of the many crises that would attend the Peloponnesian War, Sophocles draws the very nature of this power into sharp focus and carefully considers the ways in which it is created, maintained and perpetuated—questions that, as conditions in Athens grew worse through the remainder of the fifth century and as the incredible power of civic speech became more apparent, in hindsight prove to be central to the Athenian state. Ajax is a Homeric figure that is perfect for tragic reception. In him Athens could find “the inflexible determination to endure, to recall honor and fight to preserve itself as well as those other city-states leagued with it.”¹⁴⁴ But even more importantly, by virtue of his status in cult worship as a protective daemon for the *polis*, the spectrum of speech that

¹⁴⁴ Pozzi (1991) 115.

Ajax practices in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and that is taken to even greater extremes in Sophocles' tragedy—from the commanding voice that cannot be resisted to the wrathful “speaking silence” that cannot be ignored—represents the boundaries within which the Athenian civic conscience must find an acceptable mode of speech.

Conclusion

Such are the tragic receptions of the epic figures of Odysseus and Ajax by Sophocles and Euripides. As we have seen, in terms of their rhetorical ideologies, Odysseus and Ajax stand diametrically opposed to one another in both genres. While speech is the primary avenue by which Odysseus achieves his heroic *nostos* in Homer and later becomes a more sinister vehicle for overcoming his opponents in tragedy, the Homeric Ajax uses speech reluctantly, an attitude that in Sophocles' drama pits the hero against the Achaean force that he once fought to protect. In the case of these two heroes inherited by the tragic playwrights from Homer and redeployed on the stage, Sophocles and Euripides focus upon certain characteristics possessed by each hero and emphasize them in revealing ways that reflect the civic consciousness of their audience. This study has focused upon one *topos* in particular within this Athenian civic consciousness and examined the diverse ways in which it finds expression: that is, the tremendous power that speech wielded within Athenian democracy and the responsible use of civic discourse between both equal and unequal speakers. I have argued that the particular manifestations of both Odysseus and Ajax across several tragedies reflect a civic anxiety concerning the equation between rhetorical power and civic power.

The tragic depictions of Odysseus and Ajax, as well as the important and unnerving questions concerning speech that they brought to light came at a critical period for Athens. As the *polis* emerged in the late 440s as the premier political power in the Greek world and leader of the Delian League, it was forced to consider serious questions about the nature and proper dispensation of that power. While the ongoing hostilities with Sparta unfolded during the rest of the fifth century, this civic discussion about power and

its rhetorical medium became a matter of increasing urgency as the tremendous influence of talented speakers over the outcomes of civic affairs became more conspicuous. The City Dionysia, with its highly ritualized displays of Athenian wealth, influence, and martial might that was intended to invoke a sense of collective identity within its audience, was an ideal space for the expression and consideration en masse of Athenian civic ideology. As one of these rituals, the tragic performance was granted a unique ability to exhibit conflicting perspectives on untidy topics of immediate importance to the contemporary world of its audience through the invocation of figures from the distant mythological past. The disjunction and “vagueness” between these two worlds created space for the audience to interpret the questions raised by the performance in a variety of ways, thereby creating an atmosphere of civic discussion that attempts to think through conflicts such as rhetorical power and its responsible use.¹⁴⁵ I have argued that this discussion is made particularly poignant when Homeric figures appear in tragic performance for two reasons. First, because Homeric poetry was so fundamentally important to the education and social orientation of young Athenian citizens, the redeployment of these figures by tragic playwrights gestures toward fundamental aspects of Athenian ideology. Second, although Homeric figures come to the tragic stage with traditional characteristics and fixed ideological stances, tragic playwrights were free to emphasize or deemphasize those traits that most directly correlate to the aspects of the contemporary world they were seeking to invoke.

This study has explored the questions concerning rhetorical power that Sophocles and Euripides conjure in their representations of Odysseus and Ajax, and has also

¹⁴⁵ See Easterling (1997) 24ff on the “vagueness” between the contemporary and heroic worlds in tragic performance and the multiple avenues of interpretation that it opens to the audience. See Allan (2008) 5-7 for the notion that this “vagueness” not only questions civic ideology but also reinforces it.

analyzed the strategies of their receptions and “cross receptions” that make each manifestation of the heroes particularly acute. In their reimagining of the Homeric Odysseus, tragic playwrights make use of not only a particular type of speaker but also a specific type of hero. In the separate heroic paradigms proposed by Gregory Nagy, certain heroes such as Achilles are made heroic through the honor and fame (*kleos*) won through battle prowess, and other heroes such as Odysseus are made heroic by enduring a variety of trials on a homeward journey (*nostos*).¹⁴⁶ As a *nostos* hero, the Homeric Odysseus is endowed with a particular skill set that makes his return to Ithaca possible and provides solutions to problems that a more martially oriented hero could not have surmounted. As we have seen, the most important of these skills is his *sophrosune*—his clear thinking—and the speech that is its necessary medium.¹⁴⁷ The epic Odysseus is successful in several of his persuasions specifically because he is able to anticipate the needs of his listeners and can thus tailor his speech to strike the most persuasive tone possible. For instance, in book 2 of the *Iliad*, when the grim pessimism of Agamemnon’s description of his dream about the destruction of the Achaean force sends the Greeks into a panic, Odysseus is able to soothe the soldiers by responding in a calm and confident tone, reminding them that according to the prophecy of Calchas, Troy will soon fall and all will be well. Odysseus puts this skill to use even more explicitly later in *Iliad* book 9 when he delivers Agamemnon’s terms for settling the dispute to an angry Achilles. Where Odysseus detects elements in the offer that will aggravate the anger of the brooding hero, he is careful to edit Agamemnon’s original message to increase its chance of delivering a positive effect. Odysseus’ rhetorical heroism is even more

¹⁴⁶ See Nagy (1979) 34-41; note my discussion above on these heroic paradigms and the distinct aspects they offer to different heroes.

¹⁴⁷ See Stanford (1954) 66ff on this trait and the “adaptability” that it grants Odysseus.

prominent in the *Odyssey*, especially given the fact that a significant portion of the text, spanning books 9-12, is delivered through a sustained rhetorical performance not by the Homeric narrator but by Odysseus himself. Contained in this performance is the narration of several of Odysseus' most famous adventures in which the power and seductive pleasure of speech are emphasised, including the *Outis* pun of book 9 or his encounter with the Sirens in book 12. While the *Iliad* grants Odysseus only limited opportunities to employ his gift for clever speech, in the *Odyssey* he is able to complete his return only by employing this skill to its greatest potential.

Odysseus' proclivity for clever speech is emphasized even further on the tragic stage by Sophocles and Euripides, who each make use of his ability to anticipate the needs of his audience and imbue it with even more power, such that in *agones* with other characters he is able to hijack their own language and turn it against them—a practice that becomes increasingly associated with sophistic language. Sophocles' *Ajax* presents a more positive manifestation of Odysseus, who is shown in the drama to come to understand the disastrous consequences that can stem from unchecked rhetoric. At the end of the play, Odysseus dissolves the impasse over whether Ajax should be given a proper burial, by appropriating Agamemnon's use of the term *philos* and reconsidering what that term actually entails. His appearance in Euripides' *Hecuba* is less favorable, in that Odysseus conspicuously uses speech at several points to control others. In response to Hecuba's plea that he return the *charis* due to her for helping him when he was once nearly caught within the walls of Troy, Odysseus escapes any obligation to her by defining the term in a way that best suits his purpose—one that claims to satisfy the *charis* that is due to her as well as to the Achaean soldiers he claims to serve. In

Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Odysseus haunts the drama from off-stage and the mere threat of his rhetorical power plays a major role in determining the outcome of the action. Finally, in an appearance that most closely identifies the hero's rhetorical practices with those commonly linked to sophistic language, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* presents an Odysseus who embodies an unattractive rhetorical *ethos* that takes advantage of less experienced speakers for its own advantage. While at first glance this would seem a disreputable practice, I have argued that Sophocles has left space for his audience to find some practical merit to Odysseus' conduct, as it is the only approach that can serve the needs of the Achaean force as a whole. In considering these tragic reinterpretations of Odysseus, I have suggested that as the late fifth century unfolded there was an increasing trend for depicting the character in ways that would vividly reflect contemporary rhetorical styles and practices familiar to the audience, and that as this trend advances Odysseus is portrayed as increasingly villainous.

The character of Ajax stands in stark contrast to that of Odysseus, and as such we see them come into conflict with one another at several points in both epic and tragedy. In Homer, Ajax is made heroic not through rhetorical maneuvering but through his incredible martial skill and a physical and ideological obduracy that makes him an especially potent defensive force. In the *Iliad*, this "wall of the Achaeans" (ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν, 3.229) is often precisely that, most notably in his defense of the Greek ships in book 12 and his protection of Patroclus' body in book 17. As discussed at length above, Ajax's emphasis on physicality gives rise to a dismissive attitude towards the utility of speech, and with the exception of his brief and reproachful contribution during the embassy to Achilles in book 9 he refrains from rhetorical practice. Instead, the speech of

Ajax comes more frequently in the form of combat exhortations that persuade the Greek troops not through rhetorical guile but rather by brute force. With a booming combat voice that “reaches to the sky” (φωνὴ δέ οἱ αἰθέρ’ ἴκανε, 15.686), Ajax compels men to fight by calling attention to the shame they will feel for cowardice before their peers. Ajax’s sole appearance in the *Odyssey* stands in stark contrast to the vigorous force of his Iliadic combat voice, as in the underworld scene of book 11 his shade responds to Odysseus’ inquiries with only a wrathful silence. I have argued that in this encounter Ajax is not so overcome with rage that he cannot respond, but rather through his refusal to engage in speech, he robs Odysseus of the same heroic dignity that was stolen from him in the extra-Homeric contest for the arms of Achilles.

This discrepancy, as I have argued, between Ajax’s resounding combat voice in the *Iliad* and his resolute silence in the *Odyssey* serve as the endpoints of a rhetorical spectrum between the two poems, endpoints that Sophocles not only acknowledges but expands to even greater extremes in his depiction of the hero in the *Ajax*. The inversion of *logos* and *ergon* in the wake of the contest for the arms of Achilles spurs Ajax on to a murderous rampage, and in redirecting his wrath with a physical blindness it would seem that Athena also affects him with a kind of moral blindness that inhibits his ability to recognize acceptable modes of speech. Under the influence of this blindness, Ajax lapses into *hubris* as he misdirects his Iliadic combat voice at the goddess and orders her to stand always as his ally (117). As this blindness fades and Ajax comes to understand his folly, he is forced into a rhetorical situation with Tecmessa and the sailors of the chorus that is in some respects reminiscent of his role in the embassy to Achilles. Forced into a position where he cannot retain his more characteristic reticence, Ajax resorts to an

unfamiliar rhetorical strategy that, I have suggested, contains elements typically associated with sophistic language. This somewhat awkward rhetorical effort is a necessary evil that makes Ajax's final act possible, at least in a way that will assign it the meaning that Ajax intends. Although Ajax's suicide bestows upon him a permanent physical silence, I have argued that through the location of the act, the continued presence of the body on stage, and the divergence from the staging of suicides in other tragic plays we can read Ajax's death as a speech act in its own right. Indeed, this "silent speech" is a more vehement rejection of the new system of *kleos* than Ajax could have expressed in words. Just we found Ajax at the silent end of his epic rhetorical spectrum during his encounter with Odysseus in book 11 of the *Odyssey*, here Sophocles has redeployed in Ajax a "speaking silence" that deprives this new system of *kleos*—one that values *logos* over *ergon*—of the authority to dictate the terms of his funerary rituals.

In these ways, Sophocles and Euripides have reimagined Homer's Odysseus and Ajax in manners that engage with questions and anxieties concerning rhetorical power that were of immediate importance to their fifth-century audiences. The tragic reinterpretations of these two characters at once acknowledge the necessity for engaging in speech with one's fellow citizens and reveal the inherent dangers of a civic system that operates without constraints upon talented rhetorical stylists and the disproportionate amount of influence they can acquire. Although this study has chosen to focus on Odysseus and Ajax, similar questions concerning modes of speech find expression through other Homeric figures that appear on the tragic stage as well, and are worthy of close study in their own right. For instance, Euripides' tragic reimagining of Homer's Helen, in plays such as *The Trojan Women* (415 BC) and *Helen* (412 BC), explores in a

variety of ways the extent to which she is a *kalon kakon*,¹⁴⁸ a beautiful evil that is necessarily at odds with itself. In Homer, this duality is explored most thoroughly at in book 4 of the *Odyssey* during Helen's recollection of her aid to Odysseus and the desire that it inspired in her to return to Sparta, alongside Menelaus' counter-recollection of Helen standing outside the Trojan Horse mimicking the voices of the soldier's wives in an attempt to trick them into betraying themselves (4.231-89). The ancient writers Gorgias and Isocrates—two of the most prominent sophistic writers of the late fifth and early fourth centuries—each made use of Helen's duality in separate encomia¹⁴⁹ to her in order to explore a similar duality that is inherent in the power of speech. Can language, they ask, seduce the mind in a manner similar to beauty?¹⁵⁰ Further study of this sort might investigate the ways in which Euripides' staging of Helen considers the same question and the extent to which, perhaps, Helen's speech is imbued with another kind of duality that is not under her immediate control, in which her beauty says one thing but her words quite another.¹⁵¹ In his dramatic reimagining of Helen, Euripides addresses yet another aspect of the fifth-century Athenian anxiety over rhetorical power, one that through tragic performance at The City Dionysia is scrutinized and explored in a variety of ways. Through representations of Helen, Odysseus, Ajax, and other figures from Homeric epic, tragic playwrights lay a lost heroic world over their contemporary one, and in doing so reveal an ideological and aesthetic undercurrent common to each that finds expression through a new language for heroes.

¹⁴⁸ See Allan (2008) 12 for this epithet and its echo of Hesiod's description of Pandora at *Theogony* 585.

¹⁴⁹ Dates for these two encomia are uncertain. Some scholars (Guthrie, Kerferd) date Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* around 414 BC; through an allusion to a living Antisthenes (who died in 366) Isocrates' *Encomium of Helen* has been dated in late 370s. See Guthrie (1971) 304.

¹⁵⁰ Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* 10-14; Isocrates *Encomium of Helen* 54-58.

¹⁵¹ See *Helen* 262ff for Helen's desire to separate herself from her appearance. Zeitlin (1996) would serve as a useful starting point for a study such as this, especially in its exploration of gendered speech in tragic poetry and its ability to engage simultaneously both masculine and feminine elements.

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