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Drama as Dream: Sophoclean Tragedy and the Cult of Asclepius

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**DRAMA AS DREAM: SOPHOCLEAN TRAGEDY AND THE
CULT OF ASCLEPIUS**

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores tragic drama as a corresponding ritual to the incubation ritual in the cult of Asclepius and theorizes that this ritual is psychologically cathartic and healing. I argue that in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, Sophocles marks this cathartic ritual through nosological language, setting, and social context. In my first chapter, I explore Sophocles' use of the language of madness (*mania*) and illness (*nosos*) in *Ajax* to show the exacerbation of the audience's psychological state. Next, I show that catharsis is achieved through the negotiation and subsequent burial of Ajax. In my second chapter, I argue that Sophocles uses both nosological and eremitic language in *Philoctetes*, together with the isolated and suggestive setting of Lemnos, to achieve catharsis. The drama accomplishes catharsis with the promise of Philoctetes' healing by Machaon, son of Asclepius, and his reintegration into the Greek forces at Troy.

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INTRODUCTION

Catharsis in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*

There has been increased interest recently in the ability of Greek tragedy to stimulate psychological healing for struggles like chronic illness and post-traumatic stress disorder, explored most notably in Bryan Doerries' *Theater of War*.¹ Doerries uses Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* for his project, in which dramatic readings of tragedies are performed to audiences whose struggles might have some common elements with the struggles of the tragic protagonists, specifically war veterans or caretakers and patients dealing with chronic pain. Sophoclean drama offers something strikingly therapeutic: *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* in particular strike a chord with modern audiences in the visceral depictions of illness, madness, and pain. My study analyzes what it is about these plays that makes them effective psychologically in terms of catharsis, the process of cleansing or purgation of negative emotions described in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1449b 26-7). In the following chapters, my thesis will explore how Sophocles employs nosological language and various plot points, including character interactions and dramatic setting, to contribute to catharsis in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. I then connect these qualities to the contemporaneous rise of the cult of Asclepius in fifth-century Athens to posit a ritualistic parallel between incubation in the cult of Asclepius and the experience of a cathartic drama in the theater of Dionysus.

¹ Doerries' 2015 was reviewed by *The New York Times* (Shapiro 2015) and featured in articles in *The Guardian* (Sandhu 2015) and *The New Yorker* (Wright 2016). See also Meineck 2009 and 2012 on similar projects aimed at combat veterans, and Shay 1995 and 2002 for an examination of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, respectively, in light of the psychological struggle facing American Vietnam and Iraq war veterans. See also the recent article by Wilson Ring (2018) on the University of Vermont's "Homer for Veterans" course, and similar sessions and discussion groups have been offered at veterans' centers and jails.

Although this thesis leaves the effect of ancient tragedy on modern audiences to artists like Doerries, my work relates to his work, in that it incorporates a theory of healing through catharsis. My thesis connects the ritual of the cult of Asclepius to the performances in the City Dionysia, specifically the Sophoclean dramas *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. I claim that Sophocles calls attention to catharsis in the use of the language of sickness, or nosological language, and through other narrative and thematic characteristics specific to each plot. With the hope of expanding this discussion and keeping a clear focus on the language of each play, I show that *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* are cathartic dramas.

Catharsis: Background and Proposed Interpretation

In Aristotle's famous formulation, a Greek tragedy is successful if it has an emotional effect: "accomplishing the catharsis of suffering by means of pity and fear," δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 26-7). Catharsis as a term in literary criticism has a long and complex history. Stephen Halliwell describes Aristotle's use of the term catharsis as "the most vexed in the entire work."² T. J. Scheff describes Aristotle's statement on catharsis as "probably the most controversial sentence ever written."³ It is not my goal to definitively offer a new statement of what catharsis is. This thesis aims only to argue that Sophocles, in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, accomplishes this catharsis of suffering by the depiction of suffering, pain, illness, followed by removal or reintegration. My interpretation of catharsis as it is accomplished in Sophoclean tragedy is that it can accomplish any of the

² Halliwell 1995: 17.

³ Scheff 1979: 20.

three most prevalent interpretations: purgation, purification, or intellectual clarification. I see catharsis as a cultural conception that becomes manifest through the various arts (*technai*): medicine, religion, and ultimately, through Aristotle’s inventive employment of the term in literary criticism, to poetry. Because my view is that the catharsis takes place within the drama, any of those may be appropriate to the characters and situations at hand. In the following section, I outline these different interpretations of catharsis as purgation, purification, and intellectual clarification, and show how each can be useful for interpreting the cathartic quality of drama.

In Aristotelian studies, Leon Golden summarizes the popular “purgation theory”⁴ of catharsis as “the view that Aristotle’s concept of catharsis represents a process of purgation in which the emotions of pity and fear are aroused by tragic dramas and then somehow eliminated from the psyche of the audience.”⁵ The purgation theory prevailed following the work of Jakob Bernays,⁶ and scholars interpreted the term as used in *Poetics* with the assistance of another passage discussing the catharsis achieved through dance in *Politics* 1341.37-42.⁷ Purgation of these emotions is accomplished by a homeopathic method: like emotions are applied through tragic drama to drive out the like emotions in the audience.⁸ The purification theory that Golden ascribes to Butcher holds that moral purification of the emotions dissolves the feelings of fear and pity, allowing the pain to “escape in the purified tide of human sympathy.”⁹ O. B. Hardison Jr.,

⁴ Golden 1973: 473 cites Bernays 1857 as the primary work on the purgation theory.

⁵ Golden 1973: 473.

⁶ Bernays 1857.

⁷ Text is from Hackham 1932: 1341.37-42. “Still, the flute is not moral, but rather exciting, so that one must use it at those special times for it, in which the spectacle would be able to achieve catharsis rather than education.” (ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ αὐλὸς ἠθικὸν ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὀργιαστικόν, ὥστε πρὸς τοὺς τοιοῦτους αὐτῶ καιροὺς χρηστέον ἐν οἷς ἡ θεωρία κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον δύναται ἢ μάθησιν).

⁸ Golden and Hardison, Jr. 1968: 134.

⁹ Golden and Hardison, Jr. 1968: 137; Butcher 1951: 252.

however, takes issue with both the purification and the purgation theories, since they rely on the psychology of the audience.¹⁰ Hardison Jr. argues that, since Aristotle is writing on poetics, not on psychology, these tenuous assumptions about the emotional movements of the audience are taking the theory of catharsis too far afield.

Because of this objection, Golden proposes intellectual clarification instead of purgation, citing uses of catharsis by Epicurus and Philodemus that use the term intellectually, rather than morally or medically.¹¹ In this theory, the concepts of pity and fear themselves are clarified through the imitation and artistic representation on stage.¹² These interpretations offer insight and a foundation from which my thesis understands catharsis in terms of Aristotle, but my interpretation of catharsis does not rely exclusively on any one theory or scholar. I am interpreting catharsis in terms of the movements and dialogue on stage rather than what may or may not be happening within the psyche of the audience.¹³ As such, I see the process of catharsis, as Sophocles wields it in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, as a complex amalgam of these three approaches, incorporating each of these meanings – purgation, purification, and intellectual clarification – in literal and figurative ways depending on the characters and situations in the play.

Other scholars interpret catharsis in Aristotle in contrast to Plato's views on poetry and the emotions. Halliwell views Aristotle's positive idea of catharsis, with Golden, as an intellectual process, but he also retains the emotional component. Halliwell

¹⁰ Golden and Hardison, Jr. 1968: 134.

¹¹ Golden 1973: 474; Golden, as well as the LSJ (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996, *s.v. catharsis*) cite Epicurus *Ep.* 2p.36u and Philodemus *Lib.* 22o for instances where catharsis means intellectual clarification.

¹² Golden 1973: 473; see also Golden and Hardison 1968: 281-296.

¹³ In this my interpretation is closest to Else 1957: 449: "Thus the catharsis is not a change or end-product in the spectator's soul, or in the fear and pity (i.e., the dispositions to them) in his soul, but a process carried forward in the emotional material of the play by its structural elements, above all by recognition." Else, however, sees catharsis as the culmination of Aristotle's plot components (*hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, and so on) and my analysis is focused on how catharsis is accomplished and can be read in the plot of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* without consideration of later literary criticism.

suggests that Aristotle’s development of catharsis resulting from the experience of tragic drama is in response to Plato’s doctrine that poetry unleashes dangerous emotions.¹⁴ Terry Eagleton summarizes the interpretive struggle in modern terms: “The conflict between Plato and Aristotle is thus one familiar today between mimetic and therapeutic theories of pornography or media violence. Either the stuff drives us to real-life brutality, or it has exactly the opposite effect.”¹⁵ My reading is that Plato exposes a pressing issue and argues for a sort of intellectual clarification of poetry, made possible by a prior moral education that prevents overindulgence of emotion. In Book X of *Republic*, Plato claims that poetry is fundamentally damaging to the soul, while the true *pharmakon* (“remedy” or “drug”) is knowing the good:

Ὡς μὲν πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰρῆσθαι – οὐ γάρ μου κατερεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς τῆς τραγωδίας ποιητὰς καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἅπαντας τοὺς μιμητικούς – λώβη ἔοικεν εἶναι πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα τῆς τῶν ἀκουόντων διανοίας, ὅσοι μὴ ἔχουσι φάρμακον τὸ εἶδέναι αὐτὰ οἷα τυγχάνει ὄντα.

Speaking between us – for you won’t betray me to the poets of tragedies and all the other *mimetikoi* (imitators) – all these sorts of things [i.e. tragic poetry] seem to be a corruption of the understanding of those listening, who do not possess as a *pharmakon* the (ability) to know these things [tragic poetry] as they truly are.¹⁶

The danger of poetry for Plato is its impediment to understanding and its indulgence of *epithumia* (the desires for sex, food, and drink). This corruption (λώβη) is prevented if one has seen and contemplates the form of the good and is inevitable if one has not. Complete avoidance of poetry in general would be nearly impossible for an educated Greek, so we can understand Plato to suggest not that we censor poetry from our psyche

¹⁴ Halliwell 1995: 18.

¹⁵ Eagleton 2003: 154.

¹⁶ Emlyn-Jones, and Preddy 2013b, sec. 595b. Translation is mine.

entirely, but that poetry must be understood not as the *pharmakon* but as part of the human experience that the actual *pharmakon*, knowing the form of the good, would unlock. This condition then would prevent us from being poisoned by the excess in poetry, because our knowledge of the good will have inoculated us against the “power of poetry to enter the mind, to take hold of its beliefs and emotions, and to mold the personalities of those exposed to it,” as Halliwell claims of Plato’s views on the psychological power of poetry to affect individuals.¹⁷ This interpretation thus allows for the intellectual components of catharsis to work together with the emotional. Poetry then has the potential to clarify the mind while purging negative emotions like pity and fear through the homeopathic application of like emotions. Further, Plato’s strong opinions about the *technē* of poetry and the fact that he addresses it in medical terms (*pharmakon*) betray the fifth-century associations between medicine and poetry, associations which are also felt in the connection between tragic drama and the cult of Asclepius. My understanding of catharsis is that we can exclude none of these interpretations, and that, in fact, there is good reason to retain each meaning for a complete understanding of catharsis in fifth-century terms.

While philosophical interpretations of catharsis have made a substantial impact on the literary understanding of the term, catharsis can also be interpreted through the more literal lens of medical writers and religious rituals. Robert Parker explains the vital importance of catharsis in the Hippocratic understanding of healing disease: “The body is a container whose purity is naturally maintained by periodic spontaneous ‘purifications’ (excretion, menstruation, and the like). Health is the balance of the humours or vital principles present in the body. When one of them develops in excess, disease occurs, and

¹⁷ Halliwell 2002: 73.

an artificially induced purification of the peccant matter becomes necessary.”¹⁸ While it may seem sensible to view purgation as simply the medical equivalent to religious purification, Parker shows how the complicated relationship between the two is clarified in the treatment of madness, in which both approaches are used.¹⁹ Catharsis, Parker claims, is a process that is used whenever something bad, evil, deadly, or mysterious happens to a person and aims to restore a sense of “personal wholeness.”²⁰ Purgation, purification, and clarification are simply different approaches one can take in the pursuit of catharsis, and the approach depends on the circumstances.

Other scholars have examined ancient texts and practices to determine whether an ancient prototype of the modern psychological practice of psychoanalysis can be found within ideas of healing in the ancient world.²¹ C.A. Meier posits a “self-healing tendency of the psyche”²² that predates any study of psychology. While he acknowledges the ubiquity of the incubation motif in traditions all over the world,²³ Meier focuses his study on the ancient ritual of incubation in the cult of Asclepius to attempt to show that incubation is a form of homeopathy, by which the patient cures the divine illness with the divine cure: “When a sickness is vested with such dignity, it has the inestimable advantage that it can be vested with a healing power.”²⁴ According to Meier, this functions as a prototype for the modern psychoanalyst who must be analyzed herself in

¹⁸ Parker 1983: 213.

¹⁹ Parker 1983: 215-216.

²⁰ Parker 1986: 220.

²¹ Meier 1967: 1.

²² Meier 1967: i.

²³ Meier 1967: ii-iii; see also Renberg 2016: 36-106 for a study of incubation in the Ancient Near East and Egypt and Harrison 2014: 284-290 who argues that incubation did not exist prior to the development of healing shrines in Ancient Greece.

²⁴ Meier 1967: 3.

order to help others.²⁵ With Meier, my aim is to show that there is a corresponding self-healing tendency for the patient in both the pursuit of psychoanalytic therapy and in arriving to the Asclepeion to incubate and receive a healing dream. My goal, however, is not to connect ancient incubation with modern psychotherapy, but rather with the modern conception of a cathartic dream, film, novel, or experience.

Along with the abstract meanings previously discussed of intellectual clarification, and emotional purgation or purification, catharsis may also be interpreted more literally in terms of bodily discharges. If we accept Parker's proposition that the Hippocratic doctors were developing their medical ideas from purification practices in religion,²⁶ the origin for Aristotle's famous use of the term as the product of a successful tragedy in *Poetics* can be illuminated through those medical texts. Ancient medical professionals used the term catharsis and morphologically related words for bodily discharges such as excrement and menstruation.²⁷ The induction of such discharges was seen as healing: for virgins, if menstruation was delayed, the treatment applied involved sexual intercourse for the purpose of removing any obstruction to the flow of blood.²⁸ Regular and substantial discharge was seen as an indicator of health. In drama, the idea of emotional purgation is thus linked by Aristotle's use of the word "catharsis" to the more literal purgation the human body undergoes, and this balance of liquids achieved through regular discharge is what the Hippocratic texts generally refer to. Because the word connects to this literal meaning of purging unwanted or excessive humors, the semantic connection between purging and healing in medical texts also adds that layer of meaning

²⁵ Meier 1967: 3.

²⁶ Parker 1983: 213, 220.

²⁷ See *Airs, Waters, Places* §4.38; Jones 1923: *Regimen in Acute Diseases* §14.4-5.

²⁸ For more on this practice see King 2005: 156-157; King 2004: 71.

to the term in Aristotle's use, evoking the image of a purging of emotions through drama that results in healing.

Catharsis also has a more literal meaning of purification in a religious context. Patients seeking healing through an incubation dream at the temple of Asclepius were first required to ritually cleanse themselves, suggesting that healing cannot properly take place unless the patient is cleansed and thus purified.²⁹ Through the range of simple and complex associations in medicine, religion, and philosophy, a picture of catharsis emerges as a web of activities that function to improve the condition of a body through some sort of discharge, whether it is a literal fluid, an emotion, or a wrongheaded intellectual idea. Kenneth Reckford makes a case for the interconnectedness between religious purification, medical purgation, and incubation, as he argues for a comic catharsis of emotions in Aristophanes' *Wasps*: "If I am right, then [in *Wasps*] Aristophanes has presented Athens after all with a healing catharsis. It has many features in common with the forms of psychotherapy attempted by Bdelycleon: the therapy of the word, the purification rites, the Corybantic music and dance, the Asclepian incubation."³⁰ My understanding of catharsis thus incorporates methods of purification, purgation, and intellectual clarification as processes that work in tandem to achieve healing. My study of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* aims to determine whether Sophocles deliberately places a cathartic event within the drama that results in healing, with the understanding that this healing may take different forms. For *Ajax*, I argue that the catharsis takes place exclusively on stage, while in *Philoctetes* I argue that not only is catharsis achieved on stage as

²⁹ Parker 1983: 213 n. 31.

³⁰ Reckford 1977: 309.

Philoctetes is reintegrated into the Greek army and promised Asclepian healing at Troy, but also that the play calls attention to the cathartic process for the audience.

Tragic Theater and the Cult of Asclepius

In recent years, scholars have explored connections between the development of the cult of Asclepius in fifth-century Athens and tragic theater, and this thesis is indebted to their efforts. My arguments build upon the work of Lara Wickkiser's 2008 book on the cult of Asclepius in fifth-century Greece, as well as upon Robin Mitchell-Boyask's 2008 monograph on the development of Attic tragedy in conjunction with the arrival and growth of the cult of Asclepius in Athens.³¹ In particular, Mitchell-Boyask's work on medical language in Sophocles is fundamental to how I understand and incorporate contemporary Athenian medical ideas with the ritual process of catharsis in tragic drama.

As Mitchell-Boyask argues:

The persistent deployment in Sophoclean drama of disease as a physical experience and as a figure of disorder serves as the greatest incentive to link Sophocles to the Asclepius cult. Asclepius heals the Sophoclean Philoctetes upon the latter's return to society, but Sophocles' almost compulsive insistence on sick (male) heroes finds medical procedures that more often resemble social purgation.³²

What Mitchell-Boyask describes as "medical procedures that more often resemble social purgation" is the process that I interpret as catharsis in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. I am thereby indebted to his work on establishing the link between the cult of Asclepius and the Asclepeion to the theater of Dionysus and Sophoclean drama. While connections between the cult of Asclepius and Sophocles have been proposed, but only by later

³¹ Wickkiser 2008 and Mitchell-Boyask 2008.

³² Mitchell-Boyask 2012: 317.

sources,³³ Mitchell-Boyask suggests that the arrival of the cult of Asclepius in 420 BC was a result of the recent plague. Moreover, Mitchell-Boyask claims that Asclepius' arrival has some influence on the tragic stage due to the physical proximity of the theater of Dionysos to the Asclepeion.³⁴ In his chapter discussing the material evidence for the connection between the cult of Asclepius and the cult of Dionysos, or Athenian tragic drama, he claims:

The development of the cult of Asclepius in Athens and the range of myths involving him both associate him with Dionysos, the Greek god of, among other things, theater. Thus on the level of theme, ritual, and performance Asclepius is important to Greek drama in the last quarter of the fifth century and beyond.³⁵

However, Wickkiser argues that the arrival was most likely due to a number of factors, and that the plague was only one of many contributing motivations for Athenians to establish an Asclepeion.³⁶ Although I agree with Wickkiser that there were likely many contributing factors to the arrival of Asclepius, I also agree with Mitchell-Boyask that the proximity of the Asclepeion to the tragic theater, as well as the similarities between catharsis and healing (the desired end result for the respective rituals in their respective locations), leaves room for discussing the implications and problems that are opened up by that proximity.

Moreover, my thesis extends Mitchell-Boyask's work demonstrating the medical language and procedure in Sophoclean drama to show that Sophocles' connection to the cult of Asclepius, whatever its qualities, contributed to his concept of tragic

³³ The *Suda* has an entry identifying Sophocles as holding the priesthood of Halon, a hero associated with Asclepius; see Tyrrell 2006: 95.

³⁴ The Asclepeion was under construction between 420-416 BC, and Mitchell-Boyask (2008: 115-117) suggests that its orientation to the theater of Dionysus and the temple of Dionysus is unique in comparison to other Asclepeia in the Greek world that place the healing sanctuary in a rural location, pointing to a distinctly Athenian connection between the healing sanctuary and the theater.

³⁵ Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 105.

³⁶ Wickkiser 2008: 55-66.

psychology.³⁷ From there, I explore the relationship between tragic drama as a cathartic experience that resembles a dream in both its fictional quality and its often mythical and emotionally intense subject matter, and how this parallels the ritual dream healing through incubation in the cult of Asclepius. To show this, my first chapter looks at *Ajax*, and elucidates how Sophocles emphasizes the process of catharsis through the use of nosological language referring both to *nosos* and *mania* as the driving forces behind Ajax's misdirected slaughter of the livestock in place of the Greek leaders. This chapter also discusses a set of secondary terms for suffering and pain, which are used to describe the aftermath of Ajax's manic outburst and the effect of his actions on his spear-bride Tecmessa (and by extension, their child Eurysaces), his half-brother Teucer, his enemy (*echthros*) Odysseus, and his cohort of soldiers from Salamis. Further, I argue that these secondary effects require a cathartic process, the crux of which lies in the need to bury Ajax's body. My second chapter extends this interpretation to the *Philoctetes* and argues that this is where the connection between cathartic ritual and the cult of Asclepius is crystallized. In this play, Sophocles again employs nosological language and corporeal depictions of suffering, but he also uses another technique in the curious setting of uninhabited Lemnos. Thus, within the *mimēsis* of tragic drama in the theater of Dionysus, both plays accomplish catharsis on stage, similarly to the healing that takes place in the nearby Asclepeion through a dream.

The proximate location of the theater of Dionysus to the temple of Asclepius, as well as these sites' contemporaneous popularity in Athens, invite us to consider the two

³⁷ There is evidence that Sophocles wrote a paean to Asclepius, and Sophocles had a reputation as the Dexion ("Receiver") of Asclepius at Athens. See Connolly 1998; Lefkowitz 1981: 79; Tyrrell 2006: 95; and Scodel 2010: 26.

community processes in conjunction.³⁸ The process of incubation, or ritual dreaming at the Asclepeion, the temple of Asclepius at Athens, provided healing on an individual basis, and this could be achieved in a variety of ways. Incubation refers to the process whereby a patient seeking healing would come to the temple of Asclepius and sleep in the *abaton*, awaiting a healing dream or actual healing from the god.³⁹ From the *Inscriptiones Graeces*⁴⁰ there are many accounts of healing that are simply miraculous,⁴¹ some are healed through the dream alone (even by proxy),⁴² and others seem to involve an actual medicinal cure.⁴³ Walter Burkert explains how important the cathartic ritual was in terms of people who are ill, particularly for sufferers of madness, illness, or guilt that have a long-term component: “Purification rituals are therefore involved in all intercourse with the sacred and in all forms of initiation; but they are also employed in crisis situations of madness, illness, and guilt. Insofar as in this case the ritual is placed in the service of a clearly identifiable end, it assumes a magical character.”⁴⁴ Both the cult of Asclepius and the festival of Dionysus offered an opportunity for Athenians to participate in healing ritual. In the temple, a sick individual would seek relief through witnessing a

³⁸ For more on the proximity of the locations, see the diagram in Mitchell-Boyask 2008: xiv; on the material evidence for a connection between the two, see Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 105.

³⁹ For more details and *exempla* on the process of incubation, see Edelstein and Edelstein 1998, also Cilliers and Retief 2013: 69-92. The practice of incubation was not exclusive to the cult of Asclepius. Patton 2004 suggests connections to religions of the Near East and around the world.

⁴⁰ These can be found in Edelstein and Edelstein 1998: 221-229.

⁴¹ For instance, the multi-year pregnancies of Cleo and Ithmonice, which were cured by bearing a child, noted on Stele I.1 and 2. See Edelstein and Edelstein 1998: 221.

⁴² On Stele II.21, we read that Arata of Sparta was ill, and her mother slept in the *abaton* in her place; her dream graphically depicted her body hanging upside-down, with her head cut off so that humors were expelled from her neck. When her mother went home to Sparta, she found her daughter healed. See Edelstein and Edelstein 1998: 225.

⁴³ Several of the inscriptions describe a dream that depicts the application of drugs or surgical procedures, for example, Stele I.3-4, 6-7, 12-13 See Edelstein and Edelstein 1998: 222-224.

⁴⁴ Burkert 1985: 103.

dream, and this process would result in healing.⁴⁵ In the theater, this catharsis is enacted through the language and plot of the drama, one that would bring up emotions like pity and fear to expel them. Each experience offers the participant an experience that contributes to healing through witnessing action in a fictional context, action which is meant to heal the individual spectator. In the ritual at the *abaton* of the temple of Asclepius, this healing is primarily physical, while the experience of drama in the theater of Dionysus heals primarily the psyche.

Evidence from Aristophanes' *Plutus* suggests that the cult of Asclepius and its rituals were intertwined with the fifth-century Athenian culture that produced drama. One of the primary sources for the incubation process in the fifth-century is from a dramatic poet, the comic playwright Aristophanes in his play *Plutus*.⁴⁶ While there is certainly comedic license in Aristophanes' depiction of the process – which involves loud flatulence, food stealing, and spying – nevertheless, his account suggests two important details about the Asclepeion and the incubation that took place there. First, it is clear that Aristophanes was familiar with the processes that took place in the temple, and that he assumed his audience would be as well: this is hardly surprising, given the popularity of the cult at this time. Second, this comedic account of a night at the Asclepeion shows that the Greek audience would be able to find humor in it, while at the same time believing earnestly in its efficacy. From this, we can surmise that the cult of Asclepius and its rituals were intertwined with the fifth-century Athenian culture that produced drama, both

⁴⁵ Oberhelman 2013: 22 claims that healing dreams are an extension of how dreams function in Greek divination. For more work on dreams in Greek culture see Oberhelman 2013: 22 n. 60. See also Askitopoulou 2015 for a review of the role of sleep and dreams in ancient Greek medicine.

⁴⁶ The pertinent text from the play in Greek and with an English translation is in Edelstein and Edelstein 1998, sec. 420.

comedy *and* tragedy. In *Plutus*, the temple of Asclepius and the theater of Dionysus are not only proximately, but also thematically linked.

My project aims to show the nosological connection between each cathartic practice by offering close readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. The incubation practice that takes place at the Asclepeion shows how the psychological process of dreaming as an effectual way of healing is an iteration of the same theme: irritation or aggravation of something deemed excessive in order to expel the excess. This process is described by Elizabeth Belfiore as homeopathic: "[The homeopathic view] held that pity and fear produce catharsis (however it was interpreted) of similar emotions."⁴⁷ Belfiore offers as an example the catharsis as described in Plato's discussion of wine in *Laws* Books I-III.⁴⁸ In this discussion, Belfiore argues that Plato's reception of medical texts informed his view of the effects of wine as a *pharmakon* capable of educating through a form of catharsis.⁴⁹ This catharsis involved ingesting wine and weakening the ability of reason to govern the soul and then growing from that experience to help purge of us our vices.⁵⁰ These functions are performed at the individual level in the temple, and at both the individual and communal level in the theater of Dionysus, providing the spectator with a *mise-en-scène* of catharsis. Combined with the atmosphere and alcohol consumed in the theater, the effect of the drama on the audience may have resulted in a feeling of catharsis, but this thesis only aims to show that Sophocles depicts catharsis in the action

⁴⁷ Belfiore 1992: 261.

⁴⁸ For the text, see Bury 1926.

⁴⁹ Belfiore 1992: 261. By contrast, she notes: "Under the allopathic interpretation, pity and fear were thought to produce catharsis (however it was interpreted) of emotions unlike pity and fear (for example, anger, insolence, and lack of compassion)."

⁵⁰ Belfiore 1986: 432-433.

of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, and that this can be compared to *enkoimesis* (“dream incubation”) ritual in the Asclepeion.

My thesis argues that Sophocles performs cathartic rituals onstage within the characters he depicts, and thus focuses the discussion on how the language, setting, and plot of the plays accomplish catharsis. Through the exploration of fictional characters, especially those characters who have physical, mental, or emotional states that can be described in nosological terms, Sophocles provides symbols through which a community or an individual may explore their own psyche. Sophocles’ juxtaposition of an experience of illness and the conflicts that occur between the sufferer and society highlight the need for catharsis for the characters in his plays. In *Ajax*, this entails burying Ajax in some accordance with Greek burial customs.⁵¹ In *Philoctetes*, this process involves reintegrating the sick hero and providing an Asclepian cure for his illness. The ritual involving a literal dream that accompanied literal healing in the Athenian Asclepeion, possibly accompanied by a *pharmakon* of some sort,⁵² is paralleled by another religious ritual involving a figurative dream – a dramatic fiction – through which one can live out the pain and emotion of the human condition, and emerge healed in soul, if not in body,

⁵¹ See Holt 1992 on the issue of inhumation, as opposed to cremation, in the burial of Ajax. The *Little Iliad* suggests that Ajax’s burial was performed without cremation due to the anger of the king. Holt points out that this may be a marker of Ajax’s “antiquity”, since inhumation was the Mycenaean practice. Thus, his funeral is yet another quality that points to his archaism, and perhaps the army’s need to move on from the old social practices. This is also supported by Ajax’s own proclamation that his armor will be with him in his grave (τὰ δ’ ἄλλα τεύχη κοίν’ ἐμοὶ τεθάψεται, 577) apart from his famous shield which he bequeaths to Eurysaces (574-6). Teucer uses the same word for burial in 1141, as does Menelaus “I order you in front of everyone not to bury this man, so that you not fall yourself and be buried in his grave.” (καὶ σοὶ προφρονῶ τόνδε μὴ θάπτειν, ὅπως μὴ τόνδε θάπτων αὐτὸς ἐς ταφὰς πέσης, 1089-1090). Agamemnon also uses the verb and states clearly that this practice of burial, which Teucer and Ajax both seemed to understand as inhumation, is forbidden: He says he will not allow this corpse to be without a share of burial, but that he will bury it against my will,” (οὐ φησ’ ἐάσειν τόνδε τὸν νεκρὸν ταφῆς ἄμοιρον, ἀλλὰ πρὸς βίαν θάψειν ἐμοῦ, 1326-1327). Odysseus uses a compound of the verb in 1378 (συνθάπτειν), suggesting that they all had the same understanding of what sort of burial would take place, and that this is the burial Teucer performs at the end of the play (1402-1417).

⁵² On the possibilities of induced sleep as *pharmakon*, see Askitopoulou 2015 and Askitopoulou 2002.

through the cathartic experience of the performances and poetry of the tragic stage. The trajectory for this exploration is to show that the connections made between Sophoclean drama in the City Dionysia and the cult of Asclepius go much deeper than Hellenistic biographical conjecture. Furthermore, my aim is to show that both accomplish similar *cathartic* functions through ritual escape: one through fiction, the other through a dream, and that this escape employs symbolism capable of purging sickness, in whatever way that sickness becomes manifest.

CHAPTER 1

Madness and Catharsis in Ajax

Introduction

This chapter explains how Sophocles emphasizes the processes of catharsis in *Ajax* by analyzing his use of the nosological language of pain and *mania*, “madness,” and also examines how Ajax’s fellow Greek soldiers, along with his spear-bride Tecmessa and half-brother Teucer, must suffer together after Ajax’s suicide to ensure the resolution of his polluting force.⁵³ In the first half of the play, Sophocles exposes the *nosos* (illness) of Ajax, in this case represented by a madness that causes Ajax pain. My discussion shows that Ajax’s *nosos* is described as a source of pain for him by several other characters, even after the *nosos* subsides. Once Ajax has expunged himself and his illness by falling on Hector’s sword, those left behind on the shores of Troy must ultimately reconcile their own painful experience by burying the hero, a process which is aided by Ajax’s unlikely advocate Odysseus. Sophocles calls attention to this cathartic process of the drama by his use of nosological language, by opening the play with a mini-drama featuring Athena as director/*choregos*, and by staging the social process of negotiating the burial of Ajax’s corpse. These elements promote the completion of ritual catharsis through drama and inform the movement Sophocles makes between the performances of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* towards a more positive understanding of catharsis that involves not suicide or exile, but reintegration.⁵⁴ In this chapter, I show how Sophocles’ initial

⁵³ For more on the status of Tecmessa as spear-bride (*λέχος δουριάλωτον*, 211) and Teucer’s status as *nothos*, see Ormand 1999: 110-119 and 104-109.

⁵⁴ Heracles’ reference to the cult of Asclepius and the proposed accompanying deictic gesture toward the Asclepeion occurs at *Philoctetes* 1437-1438; see Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 170 for the argument for Heracles’ gesture toward the temple.

approach to the cathartic process can be demonstrated through the plot and language of *Ajax*.

A sketch of this possible trajectory begins prior to *Ajax*, in *Antigone*, a play traditionally agreed to be earlier than *Ajax*.⁵⁵ This is Sophocles' only play that directly mentions catharsis. In an ode summoning Dionysus, the chorus requests his assistance in purifying a communal *nosos*: “But now, as the whole city [Thebes] is held by a violent illness, come with purifying foot over the Parnassian hill or the groaning strait!” (νῦν δ', ὡς βιαίας ἔχεται | πάνδαμος πόλις ἐπὶ νόσου, | μολεῖν καθαρσίῳ ποδὶ Παρνασίαν ἵπτερ κλιτῶν, ἢ στονόεντα πορθμῶν, 1140-1145).⁵⁶ Sophocles thus makes a connection between Dionysian ritual dancing in the *orchēstra*, which provokes comparison with the tragic chorus, and the process of catharsis, including the very ritual occurring in the theater of Dionysus: tragic drama.⁵⁷ This reference to catharsis in *Antigone*, whether the play is dated before or after *Ajax*, demonstrates that Sophocles is developing an understanding of a ritual catharsis on stage, one that is depicted through the plot and language of the drama and the emotional journey of the characters.

I argue that in *Ajax*, Sophocles presents an individual illness as opposed to a communal one, but that this illness — the madness of Ajax — is characterized by the ability to inflict pain and suffering on the surrounding community. This pain must be exorcised, so Sophocles presents us with the extended discussion of how exactly that will take place: will Agamemnon and Menelaus get their way, and will Ajax's corpse be left

⁵⁵ Jebb 1908: li.

⁵⁶ All quotations and citations of Sophocles' tragedies are from the edition by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990. All translations are my own.

⁵⁷ For more on Dionysus and catharsis in *Antigone*, see Scullion 1998.

to rot in the sun?⁵⁸ Ultimately Odysseus' reasoned arguments prevail, and the play ends with Teucer directing the burial that will take place (1402-1471). This development paves the way for my discussion in Chapter 2: that in *Philoctetes* Sophocles expands on this conception of catharsis and ties it in with another development, the arrival of Asclepius in Athens and the establishment of his temple. From this development, a direct connection can be made between dream healing in the Asclepeion and the cathartic healing offered by tragic drama. In *Ajax*, the audience is offered a catharsis not of a community pollution like what may occur in Thebes (as in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*), but the surgical removal and burial of the offending *nosos* and a process of community healing that is brought about by discussion, not by violence.

Sophocles' *Ajax* is considered by most to be an early play, most likely performed in the 440s BC.⁵⁹ The basis for dating *Antigone* prior to *Ajax* relies on the assumption that since there are divisions of single lines between speakers in *Ajax* but not *Antigone*, that this must have been a development in Sophocles' style, which is (as Stanford admits) possibly a weak assumption.⁶⁰ Rebecca Kennedy argues for a later date, based on contemporary political considerations and the role of Athena in *Ajax*. Kennedy argues that when Athena is depicted, she represents Athenian interests and institutions.⁶¹ Since Athena's role in *Oresteia* some years previously (458 BC) was less morally ambiguous and more directly Athenian than the troubling, cruel goddess who appears in *Ajax*,

⁵⁸ Menelaus articulates his wish at *Ajax* 1062-1065; Agamemnon indicates his agreement with this at 1326-1327.

⁵⁹ Jebb 1908: li concludes, based on stylistic considerations, that *Ajax* is most likely second in age to *Antigone*, but allows for the possibility that *Ajax* is the oldest Sophoclean play. See also Stanford 1963 Appendix G: 294-296.

⁶⁰ Stanford 1963: 296.

⁶¹ Kennedy 2009: 113.

Kennedy claims that the play can reasonably be considered a later play.⁶² Kennedy thus places *Ajax* in a range between 429-412 BC, a period of oppressive rule, war strain, and complicated politics.⁶³ Evans, on the other hand, dates the *Ajax* prior to *Antigone*, placing it sometime in the decade after 450 BC. Evans claims that the representation of conflict between opposing values systems in the play and contemporary political situations in the 440's BC point to an earlier date. The link to one of these contemporary situations is evident, according to Evans, in possible connections between Cimon, an Athenian general, and Sophocles — namely that Cimon awarded Sophocles his first victory for tragic drama in 468 BC and the tradition that Cimon's ancestry was traced back to Ajax himself.⁶⁴ Both Kennedy and Evans make arguments necessarily based on events and relationships outside of the text, and in my view, neither argument definitively provides us with a new date for *Ajax*. In addition, either date is suitable for my argument that in *Ajax*, Sophocles engages in the process of developing a conception of catharsis by calling attention to it through his use of nosological language, his presentation of the role of Athena, and his characterization of Odysseus during the debate over Ajax's burial. While knowing the actual date of and circumstances surrounding the performance of the play might put us in a better position to understand the cathartic connections that the audience could make about the pain Ajax both feels and causes, the lack of these circumstances is not substantially detrimental to my reading of *Ajax* as a cathartic fiction parallel to a healing dream in the Asclepeion.

⁶² Kennedy 2009: 113-114.

⁶³ Kennedy 2009: 115.

⁶⁴ Evans 1991: 69-71. For more on dating *Ajax* see Whitman 1951: 66, Reinhardt 1979: 42-70, Kirkwood 1958: 86-9, Webster 1969: 2-7, Garvie 1998: 6-8, and Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990.

One major theme of scholarship on *Ajax* is the issue of Athena's epiphany in the beginning of the play, and her exact role in causing the *mania* Ajax suffers. Some scholars place more emphasis on the hero's agency, and for others, Athena is the source of Ajax's *mania*. Sir Richard Jebb suggests that Athena struck Ajax with madness as punishment because he showed excessive pride (*hubris*).⁶⁵ For other scholars, including Stanford, Ajax was already afflicted with violent madness, arguing that he was murderous before Athena's intervention, and he was arrogant enough to dismiss the assistance of Athena prior to the Trojan War. Bernard Knox understands the madness to be from Athena, but that this madness affects only his vision, not his mind: "The intent to torture and murder was present in Ajax sane; when he recovers from his delusions his only regret is that his victims were sheep instead of men, his disgrace is that he failed in his murderous attempt."⁶⁶ W.B. Stanford observes, "Note that Athena was not the cause of Ajax's mad rage against the Greek commanders: she simply deluded him into wreaking it on the cattle, in order to prevent any disaster to the Greek army (which was the instrument of her revenge on the Trojans)."⁶⁷ In response to Knox and others, Michael Simpson argues that Ajax was mad prior to Athena casting delusions on him: "Ajax's insanity began with his formulation of a plan to murder the Atreidae and Odysseus and was not merely cast upon him by Athene in the form of visual hallucination at the last minute in order to foil his attack."⁶⁸ N.E. Collinge states of Athena that "in fact she only added manic hallucination to an already present manic

⁶⁵ Jebb 1908: xl.

⁶⁶ Knox 1961: 5.

⁶⁷ Stanford 1963: 62.

⁶⁸ Simpson 1969: 88.

violence.”⁶⁹ R. P. Winnington-Ingram agrees, and builds his case that Ajax’s *nosos* was long-festering, as is revealed in the continued vocabulary of the state of Ajax’s *phrenes* as discussed by the chorus, Tecmessa, and Teucer, but also acknowledges that if the passions are the work of the gods, there is no contradiction between divine power and mental processes.⁷⁰ Bennett Simon argues that the play itself gives conflicting interpretations: the chorus seems to recognize the illness as divinely sent, while Tecmessa articulates that though he has relief from *nosos*, he is driven by *kakē lupē* (274-277).⁷¹ More recent scholars see the circumstances of Ajax’s *mania* as a straightforward instance of Athena making Ajax mad, especially since Athena appears to take the credit in her conversation with Odysseus.⁷² Ruth Padel claims: “Athene maddens him... it is Athene’s punishment for rejecting her help, for wanting to get glory on his own.”⁷³ Mark Ahonen presents an only slightly more complicated view, that Athena serves as an on-stage agent but that the real issue must be mental illness triggered by disappointment:

Orestes (as depicted by Aeschylus and Euripides) and Ajax (as depicted by Sophocles) were probably the most famous tragic madmen of the ancient world: guilt and disappointment, respectively, could be interpreted as causes of their mental illness, although the Furies and Athena, again respectively, appeared on stage as the authors of their insanity.⁷⁴

By depicting a hero who seems to have tension between a *mania* imposed by Athena and a pre-existing condition of obstinacy that also causes pain to the internal audiences within the play, Sophocles shows the difficulty of assigning blame to a madman, and, at the

⁶⁹ Collinge 1962: 50.

⁷⁰ Winnington-Ingram 1980: 11-56.

⁷¹ Simon 1978: 126.

⁷² *Ajax* 51-54.

⁷³ Padel 1995: 66.

⁷⁴ Ahonen 2014: 30 n. 67.

same time, the need to find a cathartic end to this story of suffering for the community that surrounds Ajax.

Various characters within the play also seem to take different tacks in approaching the root cause of Ajax’s illness. The chorus of Salaminian soldiers seems bent on characterizing Ajax as someone who was “driven mad” and “made to feel pain” by a previous sickness, utilizing passive voice verbs in their descriptions of their captain.⁷⁵ Rhetorically, this could serve the purpose of disassociating from any blame by trying to portray Ajax as sick or ill rather than simply violently murderous. On the other hand, the chorus could also be interpreting the events as they see them. In contrast, Tecmessa uses predominately active verbs and participles to describe the deeds of Ajax, implying his agency.⁷⁶ This could serve the rhetorical purpose of distancing herself from his actions, but it could also simply be her perspective of witnessing Ajax’s *mania* firsthand. Tecmessa saw Ajax in the throes of his violent onslaught, so it is reasonable that she would describe his actions in the active voice, while still acknowledging the present *nosos*.⁷⁷ Ajax himself blames Athena for his “raging illness”: “Just now the grim-eyed, untamed goddess, daughter of Zeus rejoiced at overthrowing me by her own hands, **casting my raging illness upon me**” (νῦν δ’ ἡ Διὸς γοργῶπις ἀδάματος θεὰ | ἤδη μ’ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς χεῖρ’ ἐπευθύνοντ’ ἐμῆν | ἔσφηλεν ἐμβαλοῦσα λυσσώδη νόσον, 450-452). All the characters seem to agree that an illness came upon Ajax from outside and affected him temporarily, but their choice in description distinguishes their perspectives, adding to

⁷⁵ διαπεφοιβάσθαι, 332; λυπεῖσθαι, 338.

⁷⁶ λαβῶν, 286; ἐσηλθε...ἄγων, 296; ἠύχενιζε..τρέπων 298; ἔσφαζε κάρραχιζε, 299; ἠκίζεθ...πίτων, 300; ἀπάξας, 301; ἀνέσπα, 30; συντιθείς γέλων, 303, ἐκτείσαιτ’ίων, 304; ἐνάξας, 305; ἔμφρων, 306; διοπτεύει, 307; ἠώουξεν, 308; ἔζετ, 309; συλλαβῶν, 310; ἦστο, 311; ἐπηπειλιησ’, 312; ἐξώμωξεν, 317; θακεῖ, 325; δρασειῶν, 326; θούσσει, 335.

⁷⁷ Tecmessa emphasizes the temporality of Ajax’s illness in 269-277.

the meta-theatrical effect of Athena’s epiphany. Through different receptions of Ajax’s actions by different audiences, Sophocles shows that the effect is to cause pain to everyone around him, and the cure, which Ajax himself applies, is the surgical removal of himself from community with others. Such surgical removal of an individual from a group calls attention to the pathology of the *nosos* as afflicting a member of the *polis* (“city-state”) as though it were all part of one body. Surgery is also especially appropriate for the character of Ajax. Despite knowing that he must learn to give way to the gods and honor the sons of Atreus (τοιγὰρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσομεσθα μὲν θεοῖς εἴκειν, μαθησόμεσθα δ’ Ἀτρεΐδας σέβειν, 666-667) and that he must become sensible (σωφρονεῖν, 677), Ajax chooses suicide by sword, a very surgery-like method.

Surgery, specifically to excise something, is extreme and permanent. The Greeks made a distinction between treatments that involve surgery and treatments that have to do with regimen or lifestyle. This distinction is evident in the differences in approaches between the two sons of Asclepius, Machaon and Podalirius, who each specialize in one area of treatment. The Scholiast of Homer’s *Iliad* (T at 11.515) comments on the phrase “a doctor is worth many others when it comes to cutting arrows out” as follows:

ἔνιοι δὲ φασιν ὡς οὐδὲ πάντας τοὺς ἰατροὺς ὁ ἔπαινος οὕτός ἐστι κοινός, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὸν Μαχάονα, ὃν μόνον χειρουργεῖν τινες λέγουσι· τὸν Ποδαλείριον διαιτᾶσθαι νόσους ... τοῦτο ἔοικε καὶ Ἀρκτῖνος ἐν Ἰλίου πορθήσει νομίζειν, ἐν οἷς φησι·

αὐτὸς γὰρ σφιν ἔδωκε πατὴρ <γέρας> Ἐννοσίγαιος
ἀμφοτέροις, ἕτερον δ’ ἐτέρου κυδίον’ ἔθηκεν·
τῷ μὲν κουφοτέρας χειρᾶς πόρεν ἔκ τε βέλεμνα
σαρκὸς ἐλεῖν τμηξαί τε καὶ ἔλκεα πάντ’ ἀκέσασθαι,
τῷ δ’ ἀκριβέα πάντ’ ἄρ’ ἐνὶ στήθεσσιν ἔθηκεν
ἄσκοπά τε γνῶναι καὶ ἀναλθέα ἰήσασθαι·
ὃς ῥα καὶ Αἴαντος πρῶτος μάθε χωμόμενοιο
ὄμματά τ’ ἀστράπτοντα βαρυνόμενόν τε νόημα.

But some say that this commendation does not apply generally to all doctors, but especially to Machaon, who certain people say was the only one to do surgery, as Podalirius tended illnesses ... This seems to be the view also of Arctinus in the *Sack of Iliion*, where he says:

For their father the Earth-shaker himself gave them both the healing gift, but he made one higher in prestige than the other. To the one he gave defter hands, to remove missiles from flesh and cut and heal all wounds, but in the other's heart he placed exact knowledge, to diagnose what is hidden and to cure what does not get better. He it was who first recognized the raging Ajax's flashing eyes and burdened spirit.⁷⁸

Surgery and the cutting away of diseased flesh from the body is associated specifically with Machaon, the son of Asclepius,⁷⁹ who performs surgery in *Iliad* 4 for Menelaus.⁸⁰ It is his brother Podalirius, however, who ascertains through Ajax's eyes and mood that he is ill. But while Podalirius is associated with dietetic healing, Ajax rejects a change in lifestyle, choosing instead a Machaonic therapy of self-excision from society. In the play, Ajax applies self-administered Asclepian healing in keeping with Machaon's methods, despite the indications that he should be using Podalirius' methods, and the results of this action cause more pain to others, who must ultimately suffer together and restore Ajax in the form of burial.

First, this chapter focuses on how the language of madness and illness is shaped by Sophocles' conception of communal catharsis. I analyze this nosological language on two levels: the primary level of *nosos/mania* language, and the secondary level of related words for pain and suffering: *lupē*, *algos*, *odunē*, and *ania*. My analysis then illuminates how Sophocles emphasizes the effects of Ajax's *nosos/mania* on other individuals in the

⁷⁸ Text and translation by M.L. West 2003: 148-49; cf. Edelstein 1998: T141: 67-68.

⁷⁹ Arctinus (as quoted by the scholiast to Homer) assigns paternity of Machaon and Podalirius to Poseidon.

⁸⁰ *Iliad* 4.192-222; 11.512-520. Ajax himself refers to this surgical removal in *Ajax* 581b-582.

play as well as the chorus, showing the communal pain and suffering Ajax causes.⁸¹ By witnessing these events in a civic context, the theater audience comes to terms with the clash between self and community as they watch the characters in the drama undergo a triple cathartic process of suffering, debating the burial, and finally burying Ajax. Sophocles thus demonstrates the importance of ritual catharsis on a communal level in the theater of Dionysus through metatheatrical references to the internal audiences in the play, nosological language, and debate between interested groups over what must be done with the corpse.⁸² I argue that in *Ajax*, Sophocles' infusion of cathartic themes of surgery, and suffering and pain, anticipate the direct comparison I make in *Philoctetes* between cathartic healing in the theater through fiction, and Asclepian healing in the temple through a dream.

Next, this chapter examines how the social mores of the helping friends/harming enemies ethical system led to dramatic situations like Ajax's suicide and the subsequent debate over his burial. Utilizing the work of Ruby Blundell, I examine the ethical system upon which Ajax bases his decisions, both to do violence to others and to himself.⁸³ Ajax operates on a rigid and permanent interpretation of helping friends/harming enemies: for Ajax, there is no possibility of moving between the positions of *philos/echthros*. His interpretation ultimately leads him to the conclusion that he must excise himself from the symbolic body of the Greek army, as though he were a toxic wound, pollution, or stain, due to his inability to change his approach to the

⁸¹ Barker 2004: 4 also posits that *Ajax* is an opportunity for Sophocles to investigate Ajax from the perspective of those around him.

⁸² The idea that the theater space was also a civic space is owed to Goldhill 1996: 97-129.

⁸³ See Blundell 1989: 60-105 on the ethical system in *Ajax*. Knox 1961: 3-4 also discusses heroic code as it figures in *Ajax*, arguing that Sophocles' point is to show that this old code of morality is simply impractical. See also Goldhill 1986: 79-88.

friends/enemies system. My study focuses on this ethical system as the ideological source of Ajax's violence and the source of Agamemnon and Menelaus' decision to deny him burial. Odysseus is the agent that moves the system to a more fifth-century model of mutability based on the circumstances, and I argue that this social change spurred on by Odysseus's words and persuasion — his *logoi* — support the claim that Sophocles is concerned with drama as a community experience that achieves catharsis. In the chapter's conclusion, I show how the nosological language and the language of community bonds are linked ideas, preparing the way for the more explicit connections between dream healing in the cult of Asclepius and Sophoclean drama that I explore in the following chapter on *Philoctetes*.

Nosological Language: *Mania* and Athena as Director

Sophocles uses language depicting the clinical symptoms of *mania*, together with other nosological terminology, to emphasize the pain-inducing effects of Ajax's *mania* that spread to those around him. In the first tier of nosological language are the various terms directly related to *nosos* and words describing the mental state of Ajax that have to do with *mania*. The second tier includes words like *lupē*, *algos*, *odunē*, and *ania*, which are used of the individuals who suffer because of Ajax's illness and *mania*: these terms function together to show the communal cathartic effect for the characters on stage as they put aside their suffering in order to bury the body of Ajax. For the ancient Greeks, *mania* was the most common noun used to denote frenzy: "*Mania* has the sudden violence of a 'fit of madness'," as Padel notes.⁸⁴ In tragedy, according to Padel, *mania* — like other areas of human experience involving *menos* ("force") and *eros* ("passion") —

⁸⁴ Padel 1995: 20.

can be an experience that builds up and then climaxes: thus, it is seen as temporary.⁸⁵ Moreover, since *mania* comes from outside, this analysis demonstrates how Athena causes the *nosos* that results in Ajax's murderous violence becoming directed at the cattle and herdsmen, but that the resulting pain and suffering still remains to be dealt with. In addition, *mania* is marked by the actions it accompanies. As such, Padel notes that in tragedy madness is often discussed in terms of the verbal action that results.⁸⁶ Madness then, since it is characterized by verbal action, is therefore defined not by a state of mind, but by the outcome of the acts carried out under that state of mind. In his use of descriptions of *nosos*, *mania*, and subsequently the secondary terms for pain, Sophocles focuses on the outcome of Ajax's madness not only on him, but also on those who survive him. Sophocles works out a cathartic outcome by burying the body of Ajax, a process negotiated through the two *agōn* scenes between Teucer, Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus. On-stage catharsis is more clearly a parallel ritual to incubation in the cult of Asclepius in *Philoctetes* where the hero is integrated and healed. Still, analyzing *Ajax* in terms of burial as a cathartic ritual can explain how Sophocles develops his conception of resolution and catharsis.

Ajax opens with Odysseus on stage, hot on the tracks of Ajax, the crazed hero turned butcher, and Athena, whose voice *ex machina* orchestrates a scene between the two heroes. This scene offers diverse instances of sense obfuscation: Odysseus can only hear Athena, as he tells her, "How readily I hear your voice and apprehend it in my mind, even if you are out of my sight" (ὥς εὐμαθέες σου, κὰν ἄποπτος ἦς ὄμως, | φώνημι' ἀκούω

⁸⁵ Padel 1995: 20-21, 30.

⁸⁶ Padel 1995: 23-33; See also Thumiger 2013: 65 for an analysis of how forms of *mania* are used in the Hippocratic corpus. Thumiger concludes that verbal forms are the most frequently used.

καὶ ξυναρπάζω φρενί, 15).⁸⁷ Athena ensures that Ajax will not see Odysseus: “But now he will not see you, though you are present near him” (Ἄλλ' οὐδὲ νῦν σε μὴ παρόντ' ἴδηπέλας, 83). Both heroes suffer from a loss of sight, but Odysseus *knows* that there is something he cannot see, and someone who cannot see him. Odysseus cannot see Athena, and Ajax cannot see Odysseus, but there is no indication in the text that Ajax cannot see Athena. Ajax calls out the fact that she is standing near in his greeting (ὡς εἴ παρέστης, 92) and again when he states, “Always stand by me like this, as an ally!” (τοιάνδ' αἰεὶ μοι σύμμαχον παρεστάναι, 117). In the Homeric tradition, Odysseus communicates with Athena only verbally, emphasizing that his facility with words is critical to his connection with the divine.⁸⁸ This scene offers a metatheatrical focus on who is watching whom, as a sort of comment on the theatrical process.⁸⁹ This opening scene is envisioned primarily through the perspective of Odysseus, so from the beginning, we are experiencing the results of Ajax’s *mania* from the outside, and we are struck with the effects his temporary onset of *mania* leaves upon Odysseus and others.

The lack of connection between the enemy heroes is marked by a corresponding lack of verbal communication. This complete absence of verbal connection between the two in the opening of Sophocles’ *Ajax* recalls the most famous non-interaction between Odysseus and Ajax that occurs at *Odyssey* 11.543-67, where Ajax turns silently from

⁸⁷ For more on the translation of the critical word ἄποπτος, which I translate as “out of my sight,” see Pucci 1994: 19, who argues that the word is ambiguous and leaves open the possibility that Athena is visible but distant, and Stanford 1963 *ad loc*, whose analysis includes the possibility that Odysseus could not see Athena at first, in the dim light of daybreak, but moves closer to her as the dialogue continues.

⁸⁸ See Pucci 1994: 15: “This (hearing her voice) is the only way through which Odysseus receives and recognizes the presence of Athena (*Il.* 2.282, ὃ δὲ ξενέηκε θεᾶς ὅσα φωνησάσης, and 10.512.)” See also on 20 n. 12 for Pucci’s summary of another analysis he made of Athena’s full epiphany to Achilles as contrasted with her partial epiphanies to Odysseus. Pucci suggests that these partial epiphanies imply that Odysseus is less difficult to persuade, possibly because he already wishes for the outcome Athena hopes to achieve.

⁸⁹ For more on the emphasis on spectating in *Ajax*, see Barker 2004.

Odysseus in the underworld. In the Homeric scene, Ajax is apart from the others (νόσφιν, *Od.* 11.544) and still full of anger over losing the arms of Achilles (κεχολωμένη εἵνεκα νίκης, *Od.* 11.544). Yet in the Homeric passage Odysseus addresses Ajax with soothing words (ἐπέεσσι μελιχίοισιν, *Od.* 11.552). But Ajax is immune to the charms of Odysseus, and he walks away silently (ὁ δὲ μ' οὐδὲν ἀμείβετο, βῆ δὲ μετ' ἄλλας ψυχὰς, *Od.* 11.563-564).⁹⁰ In both Sophocles' *Ajax* and in the scene from the underworld in *Odyssey* 11.543-567 the interaction between the two heroes is characterized by seeing, but not speaking to one another.

Sophocles develops the Homeric tradition of the lonely, bitter, grudging Ajax by exploiting the medical undertones of his anger in the root word χολόω (*Odyssey* 11.544),⁹¹ which in Sophoclean usage seems to imply a sense of anger specifically over an unjust award. In *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus uses the same word (κάγὼ χολωθεῖς, 374) as he relates to Philoctetes a fictional conversation he had with Odysseus over the very issue of Achilles' arms, in order to ally himself with Philoctetes, against the Greek leadership. Neoptolemus, as Achilles' son, has a legitimate claim to the arms; as does Ajax. Odysseus even admits in *Odyssey* 11 that Ajax is, in appearance and deeds, next to Achilles (Αἴανθ', ὅς περὶ μὲν εἶδος, περὶ δ' ἔργα τέτυκτο | τῶν ἄλλων Δαναῶν μετ' ἀμύμονα Πηλεΐωνα, *Od.* 11.550-551). The awarding of the arms to Odysseus over Ajax or Neoptolemus is a source of *cholē* for the losers, and in Homer, Odysseus even admits he never should have won them: “How I ought never to have won them in that contest” (ὡς δὴ μὴ ὄφελον νικᾶν τοιῶδ' ἐπ' ἀέθλω, *Od.* 11.548). The identity of the

⁹⁰ For more on the intertext between Sophocles' *Ajax* and Homer and the epic tradition, see Burian 2012: 70-71.

⁹¹ The noun χολή “gall, bile” and related verbs χολάω or χολόω, are understood to mean being full of black bile, or, metaphorically, to be angry/to rage. See Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996: s.vv. χολάω, χολόω, and χολή.

judges in this contest seems to change for Sophocles' purposes. In *Odyssey*, Athena along with the sons of Trojans awarded the arms (*Od.* 11.547), but in *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus, possibly for rhetorical purposes — that is, to align himself with Philoctetes against the other Greeks — blames the Greek army. In his relation of the fictional conversation between him and Odysseus, Neoptolemus confirms to Philoctetes that the Greek leaders (οὔτοι, referring back to the Ἀτρείδας in line 361) were responsible for awarding the arms to Odysseus (δεδώκασ' ἐνδίκως οὔτοι τάδε, 373). Yet this same account Sophocles has Neoptolemus provide in *Philoctetes* seems to be the version of events Ajax believes in *Ajax* as well. Ajax clearly blames Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus for the unjust award, as evidenced by his attempted slaughter of them. In *Ajax* both Menelaus and Agamemnon refer to the judges in the *agōnes* in their exchanges with Teucer, suggesting that they themselves were not part of the voting; nevertheless, Teucer seems to blame them for the result.⁹² The *cholē* that seems to affect the losers of this judgement seems to also blind them to its source. The lack of a direct connection between Ajax's murderous intentions and the actual arbiters of the awarding of Achilles' arms is another indication that his actions are related to his temporary state of madness.

The only mention of *cholē* in *Ajax* is found in the chorus' exchange with the messenger, just after Ajax's "deception speech" in 646-692,⁹³ and the chorus is under the impression that Ajax has put aside his anger: "But he is gone, having turned in his thoughts toward something better, that he rid himself of anger with the gods" (ἀλλ' οἴχεται τοι, πρὸς τὸ κέρδιον τραπεῖς | γνώμης, θεοῖσιν ὡς καταλλαχθῆ ἰχόλου, 743-744). Other words noting Ajax's intractability or obstinacy are used by the chorus, but

⁹² See 1135-1136 for Teucer's accusation and Menelaus' response referencing the judges (δικασταῖς); Agamemnon refers to the judges (κριταῖς) in 1243.

⁹³ Crane 1990: 89 n. 1, discusses the "endless" controversy among scholars over the deception speech.

this particular word, *cholē*, is used specifically only here and in reference to the gods.⁹⁴ Yet when considering the emotions expressed in the opening of the play, the paradox is in the way Ajax responds to Athena: he does not seem angry, but rather appears happy to see her and eager to boast of his recent exploits.

As Athena appears outside of Ajax's hut, the audience witnesses the action just as Odysseus does, who is present but not visible to Ajax. Ajax greets Athena without comment, which seems to support that he catches sight of her immediately upon exiting his hut, "Greetings, Athena!" (ὦ χαῖρ', Ἀθήνα, 91). Athena is not so much in control of the humans as she is directing their senses, like a dramatist directs the audience's attention on stage. Pucci argues that Athena's epiphany functions as a sort of mini-drama culminating in the final moral she proclaims in 127-133, and that her epiphany shows Odysseus his own lack of power, thus espousing a "tragic vision of man's powerlessness."⁹⁵ Yet ultimately, Odysseus successfully accomplishes his goals. First, with Athena's help and confirmation, he tracks the suspected murderer and livestock thief. Second, Odysseus persuades Agamemnon and Menelaus to allow a burial to proceed for Ajax. Though I agree with Pucci that Athena's "marginal" epiphany results in a metadrama, I argue that by focusing the attention onto a divine illness and its fallout, which spreads suffering and discontent, Sophocles also makes a comment on the potential for the dramatic process to achieve a cathartic result, as Odysseus' *logoi* ultimately do on stage. Sophocles thus uses Athena's epiphany to call attention to the dramatic process itself, which is the foundation for demonstrating the need for communal catharsis within the play through the language of *nosos* and *mania*.

⁹⁴ The chorus wishes for Ajax to repent of his anger for the Atreidae, μεταγνώσθη θυμῶν Ἀτρεΐδαις, (717-718), and describes Ajax as being stubborn in his *phēn*, στερεόφρων, 926.

⁹⁵ Pucci 1994: 27.

Athena continues to establish her directing role in a speech beginning with the momentous word *ego* (51). Athena states: “I am keeping him away from an incurable delight, casting on his eyes oppressive notions, and I turned him against the flocks and the spoil mingled and undivided, guarded by the shepherds” (Ἐγὼ σφ' ἀπείργω, δυσφόρους ἐπ' ὄμμασι | γνώμας βαλοῦσα, τῆς ἀνήκεστου χαρᾶς, | καὶ πρὸς τε ποιμένας ἐκτρέπω σύμμικτά τε | λείας ἄδαστα βουκόλων φρουρήματα, 51-54).⁹⁶ The “incurable delight,” Ajax’s murderous intention, anticipates the inability for Ajax to be reintegrated while alive. Athena diverts him from carrying these out by casting delusions which are difficult to bear (δύσφορος γνώμας, 51-52) over his eyes. In the Sophoclean corpus, the γνώμη typically refers to the faculties of intelligence that are located in the head: the word is often translated as “thoughts, judgments, notions or convictions.”⁹⁷ The Hippocratic texts also associate the γνώμη with the head.⁹⁸ However, Athena uses the plural (γνώμας, 52) which the LSJ identifies as “fancies, illusions” referencing this line.⁹⁹ The combination of the two is listed in the LSJ (*s.v.* δύσφορος) as “false, blinding fancies,” but perhaps rather than simply “false” the γνώμας here are difficult to bear in the sense of being difficult to reconcile mentally; and so, perhaps, the δύσφορος γνώμας Athena sends are a sort of delusion that is unsustainable mentally. It is difficult to untangle a precise meaning from this pairing, but it remains clear that Athena has the capability to divert Ajax’s eyes and his mind, causing Ajax to believe that the livestock were men.

⁹⁶ Stanford 1963 (61-62) states that the adjective ἀνήκεστος (“incurable”) introduces the sickness theme, which is in keeping with my interpretation. Thus, I take the genitives as genitives of separation (with ἀπείργω) rather than genitives of description modifying δύσφορος γνώμας.

⁹⁷ See *Antigone* 176; *Oedipus Tyrannos* 398, 524, 687, 1098; *Electra* 1021; *Philoctetes* 910 and *Oedipus at Colonus* 403.

⁹⁸ For example, see Jones 1923 for *Regimen in Acute Diseases* §63.8: “So the strength will take hold of **the head and gnōmē**” (οὕτω τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴνου μένος ἔπτοίτο **κεφαλῆς καὶ γνώμης**).

⁹⁹ Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996, *ad loc.*, III.4.

Athena goes on to provide more detail about her agency in driving Ajax’s state of mind: “I urged the man on, wandering in his mad illnesses, and I hurled him into evil snares” (Ἐγὼ δὲ φοιτῶντ’ ἄνδρα μανιάσιν νόσοις | ὄτρυνον, εἰσέβαλλον εἰς ἔρκη κακά, 59-60). Though she gives more information about Ajax’s state and declares her agency, Athena’s proclamation does not eliminate doubt that she is the sole source of Ajax’s *mania*: is this a result of the δυσφόρους γνώμας, or is this a previously held *nosos*? As Stanford concludes: “Athena was not the cause of his madness, only of his delusion.”¹⁰⁰ However, Tecmessa’s descriptions of the previous night and Ajax’s *nosos* rely heavily on temporal adverbs: “**Now** he lies in a storm of illness” (νῦν... κεῖται χειμῶνι νοσήσας, 205); “Our esteemed Ajax, seized by *mania* **during the night**, was disgraced and lost face” (μανία γὰρ ἀλοῦς ἡμῖν ὁ κλεινὸς νύκτερος Αἴας ἀπελωβήθη, 216-217).¹⁰¹ Tecmessa describes the suffering Ajax endures after his *mania* is gone: “**And now** he, in his right mind, has a **new** pain” (καὶ νῦν φρόνιμος νέον ἄλγος ἔχει, 259). Tecmessa refers to his former illness several times: “**Now**, while he is no longer sick” (οὐ νοσοῦντος... νῦν” 269); and “**when** he was amidst the illness” (ἠνίκ’ ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ, 271). Tecmessa, Ajax’s war-bride, is the only witness to his actions in the tent who speaks in the play, and the chorus believes her account, reiterating what she previously said as an explanation for Ajax’s loud outcry (ἰὼ μοί μοι, 336): “It seems the man is either sick, or he suffers pain from living with his previous illness” (ἀνὴρ ἔουκεν ἢ νοσεῖν, ἢ τοῖς πάλαι νοσήμασι ξυνοῦσι λυπεῖσθαι παρών, 337-338). It is clear to Tecmessa that during the night, Ajax

¹⁰⁰ Stanford 1963: 59-60.

¹⁰¹ My translation of this difficult line is based on the interpretation that following the contest for the arms going in Odysseus’ favor, Ajax is disgraced. After his subsequent *mania* driven by revenge at this disgrace, Ajax is even more disgraced, since his revenge plot was thwarted by the *mania* sent from Athena (and the *mania* is qualified as having only extended through the night). He loses face to the point where he must simply exit society through suicide — hence the ἀπό prefix of the verb ἀπελωβήθη. See Scodel 2008 for a presentation of the concept of “losing face” in social interactions in Homeric epic.

became ill, probably because of suffering the outrage of losing the contest for Achilles' arms to Odysseus (216-217); but then Ajax came back to his senses, as Tecmessa describes in more detail to the chorus (305-310). The words for *nosos* and *mania* are linked with a specific time period in the action: that is, while Ajax was committing his heinous acts of slaughter. Following the return of his senses, the secondary words for pain and suffering begin to be used, which contain no divine external source as the terms *mania* and *nosos* do, though they are linked to the *nosos* as the source of this secondary pain.

The combination of the rare adjective *μανιάς* with the noun *νόσος* in line 59 gives the impression that *mania* is the type of illness (*nosos*) Ajax is experiencing. This rare combination is not found in any other Sophoclean drama, and the only other fifth-century text with this combination is Euripides *Orestes*.¹⁰² Sophocles applies this term uniquely to describe the particular character of the *nosos* with which Ajax has been afflicted, and that *nosos* becomes apparent through the verbal action performed by the sufferer.

Athena reiterates the visibility of Ajax's *nosos* as she explains to Odysseus what she will do: "And I will also show you this manifest illness" (Δείξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τήνδε περιφανῆ νόσον, 66). The manifest nature of the *nosos* will be displayed to Odysseus on stage: the *nosos* Ajax suffers from is namely that he still believes the livestock in his tent are his enemies Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus and he intends to inflict more violence on his victims. Athena is showing the illness manifest on stage so that Odysseus may be a witness to it, paralleling the function of the dramatist who directs the action for the audience. Thus, it seems that Ajax's *nosos* characterized by *mania* is part of Athena's

¹⁰² See Diggle 1994: *Orestes*: 227-228.

delusion,¹⁰³ leading to the frightening conclusion that the actual violence against his enemies was Ajax's purpose even when he was sane. We have textual indication that Ajax has been in control of his *phrēn* at some point in the same company with Odysseus. In response to Athena's question "Do you shrink from looking at the man, evidently mad?" (μεμηνότ' ἄνδρα περιφανῶς ὀκνεῖς ἰδεῖν, 81), Odysseus assents, clarifying that his fear of Ajax existed prior to the *nosos*: "Yes, because even when he was sane, I would not stand apart in shrinking fear" (Φρονοῦντα γὰρ νιν οὐκ ἂν ἐξέστην ὀκνῶ, 82).¹⁰⁴ Thus, Ajax's *mania* only resulted in diverting his violent intentions. Sophocles describes this *mania* sent by Athena as a *nosos* to call attention to how the *nosos* will be expunged in the drama. Because Ajax's *nosos* has lingering effects on his surrounding community, catharsis is not achieved with his suicide, but only with his burial, which turns out to be an issue that must be verbally argued by Odysseus.

Understanding the dynamics of Ajax's *nosos*, both physically and mentally, reveals Sophocles' use of the theme of Ajax's *nosos* to call attention to the cathartic process of drama within the performance itself. The role of Athena as director — saying one thing to one person, and one thing to another to move the plot forward — demonstrates how Sophocles himself calls attention in his drama to *nosos* as both an individual and a community problem, and how the problem of *nosos* — or *mania*, as the *nosos* is manifest in the character of Ajax — must be addressed by all members of the community in order to live together harmoniously.

¹⁰³ Ajax also describes his illness as "raging," λυσσῶδη νόσον, 452. This adjective is also rare, used in Iliad 13.53 of martial rage and in Euripides *Bacchae*, 981 of Dionysiac frenzy; see Padel 1995: 18-20 for Lussa as personified violent madness in Euripides' *Heracles*.

¹⁰⁴ See Beekes's 2010 entry (p. 1590) for φρήν, which lists φρονέω as a derivation of φρήν, and Sophocles appears to be employing it in that sense here: Odysseus has witnessed Ajax in possession of his senses, but even then, he was afraid to confront him, showing that Ajax, when sane, was still a violent threat to Odysseus.

Nosological Language: Physical Pain (or Shared Pain)

Sophocles uses various forms of the words *lupē*, *algos*, *odunē*, and *ania* to convey the difference between suffering from a *nosos/mania*, and suffering pain caused by the memory of the *mania* or the things that were done as a result of it. This is significant for my larger analysis of Sophocles' use of nosological language to call attention to the cathartic function of drama and to suggest parallels between the experience of drama and incubation in the *abaton* at the Asclepeion. These secondary terms of suffering are used to describe the result of cathartic failure. They are secondary not only because they occur for Ajax after the *nosos/mania* Ajax experiences, but also because these are the words used to describe the way his actions affect others. The effects inflicted on Teucer and Tecmessa are the most pronounced in the play. Teucer is Ajax's half-brother: they share a father, but Teucer's mother is a war-bride. This lineage means that Teucer is a *nothos* ("illegitimate son" or "bastard"), and thus occupies a lower standing than Ajax does as the *gnēsios*, the product of Telamon and his recognized wife.¹⁰⁵ Both Teucer and Tecmessa suffer from a less-than-legitimate status either as son or wife, and this colors their speech and reaction in the drama with despair and frustration. Likewise, we find that other characters, those who take their own social legitimacy for granted, react to the events with an attitude of action. Sophocles orchestrates a cathartic resolution to this collision of characters and to Ajax's *mania*, suicide, and the suffering that those events caused.

¹⁰⁵ See Ormand 1999: 104-123 on Tecmessa as a war-bride and Teucer as *nothos*, and how these statuses call attention to questions of birth and citizenship in fifth-century Athens.

Characters with limited power, such as Tecmessa, react to Ajax's *nosos/mania* with suffering and pain, while those with power (Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus) respond with action. Menelaus' anger takes the form of a prohibition to bury Ajax: "If we could not overcome him with strength while he saw the light of day, we will at least totally rule over him while dead" (εἰ γὰρ βλέποντος μὴ ἄδυνηθημεν κρατεῖν, πάντως θανόντος γ' ἄρξομεν, 1067-1068). Agamemnon echoes Menelaus' prohibition but focuses his anger more on Teucer's impudence as a *nothos* who dares to speak to kings, going so far as to insult his very language: "I cannot understand your barbaric language" (τὴν βάρβαρον γὰρ γλῶσσαν οὐκ ἔπαίω, 1228).¹⁰⁶ However, Odysseus acknowledges that he feels sorry for Ajax (ἐποικτίρω, 121). Odysseus' pity translates into an effort to persuade Agamemnon to allow Teucer to bury Ajax when he returns to the stage beginning at line 1332, which allows his character to achieve the catharsis of painful emotions for Tecmessa, Teucer, Menelaus and Agamemnon, as well as the chorus of sailors from Salamis.

Sophocles magnifies Athena's references to Ajax's *nosos* with nuance and depth as other characters make use of nosological terminology in their descriptions of Ajax and his actions. The chorus sings to Ajax: "It could be a divine illness has come" (ἦκοι γὰρ ἄν θεία νόσος, 185),¹⁰⁷ immediately linking the *nosos* to outside supernatural forces.

¹⁰⁶ On this line Stanford 1963: 213 states: "It is hard to believe that 1263 is not an explanatory *Interpolation*. Agamemnon in his hunger has used some absurd exaggerations already, but could he possibly say that Teucer, born and bred in Greece, and his comrade in arms for nine years, spoke a foreign language?" The fact that Teucer does not mention this particular taunt in his reply is the only concrete evidence Stanford puts forth. Neither the logical incoherence of the insult nor the lack of a response by Teucer are antithetical to their characterization in the rest of the play, however, so I reject the notion that this must be an interpolation.

¹⁰⁷ See Stanford 1963: 95-96 for more on the curious use of the present optative here. Stanford suggests it reflects the chorus' wavering mind, which probably results from their struggle to reconcile their admiration for their commander with his apparently heinous deeds. They speculate that Artemis caused this from some slight (172) or maybe Enyalios (179), so it seems that this speculation in using ἦκοι is just concluding that

Tecmessa, as noted above, attributes Ajax’s fluctuating state of mind to two separate causes: the first is a *nosos* that caused pain, and then when that passed, Ajax is suffering from evil pain (λύπη...κακῆ), which inflicts pain on those around him (269-277):

Tecmessa: Ἡμεῖς ἄρ' οὐ νοσοῦντος¹⁰⁸ ἀτώμεσθα νῦν.

Chorus: Πῶς τοῦτ' ἔλεξας; οὐ κάτοιδ' ὅπως λέγεις.

Tecmessa: Ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος, ἠνίκ' ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ,
αὐτὸς μὲν ἦδεθ' οἷσιν εἶχετ' ἐν κακοῖς,
ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών·
νῦν δ' ὡς ἔληξε κἀνέπνευσε **τῆς νόσου**,
κεῖνός τε **λύπη** πᾶς ἐλήλαται **κακῆ**,
ἡμεῖς θ' ὁμοίως οὐδὲν ἤσσοιεν ἢ πάρος.
Ἄρ' ἔστι ταῦτα δις τόσ' ἐξ ἀπλῶν **κακά**;

Tecmessa: Now we suffer, though he is no longer ill.

Chorus: How can you say this? I do not know what you are saying.

Tecmessa: This man, when he was **in the midst of illness**,
He took pleasure in those evils that held him,
But his presence **distressed us who were sane**:
And now since he has left off and recovered **from illness**,
He is utterly driven **by evil pain**,
and we are likewise, no less than before.
Are these not **two evils**, instead of one?

Tecmessa clearly believes that Ajax is not better off for recovering from his illness: once controlled by *nosos* and *mania*, now that those have subsided, he is driven by *kakē lupē* (275). Ajax’s *nosos* and his current bemoaning his actions of the previous night cause grief to Tecmessa and to anyone else around Ajax. Further, his experience of *mania* was at least pleasurable to him: now is simply suffering all around. The *nosos*, characterized by maniacal action, was not a one-time ailment. Devastating repercussions remain, as we

one of these possibilities, or some other divinity, caused the illness; but regardless the *nosos* is from a god, thus Lloyd-Jones 1994: 49 translates the clause: “No, a godsent sickness must have come upon you.”

¹⁰⁸ This is an emendation in the OCT by Hermann: Stanford 1963: 96-97 argues that νοσοῦντες from the codices is the correct reading. This suggests that those near Ajax suffer, though they are not sick. It seems to me the temporal distinction describing Ajax’s individual *nosos* in line 271 (ἠνίκ' ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ), which we addressed in the previous section, supports Hermann’s reading, and undermines Stanford’s rather sexist and certainly unsupported assertion: “As a woman more interested in the actual emotional implications of a situation than in the presence or absence of its first cause, Tecmessa argues that in fact everyone has greater reason to feel unhappy now than when Ajax, owing to his madness, was unaware of his fatal folly.”

see in 336-338, and Ajax is still burdened with residual pain from his previous illness. Far from being relieved, the *mania/nosos* seems to turn into various other forms of suffering. Tecmessa again uses the word *ania* for the painful anguish Ajax has left behind after his suicide: “For Ajax is no longer there for them, but for me he is dead and gone, leaving behind anguish and weeping” (Αἴας γὰρ αὐτοῖς οὐκέτ' ἔστιν, ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ λιπὼν ἀνίας καὶ γόους διοίχεται, 973-4). When Teucer catches sight of Ajax’s corpse, he also laments using the secondary vocabulary (992-5):

ὦ τῶν ἀπάντων δὴ θεαμάτων ἐμοὶ
ἄλγιστον ὧν προσεῖδον ὀφθαλμοῖς ἐγώ,
 ὁδός θ' ὁδῶν πασῶν **ἀνιάσασα** δὴ
 μάλιστα τοῦμὸν **σπλάγγνον**, ἦν δὴ νῦν ἔβην

Oh! Most **painful** sight of all for me,
 of everything my eyes have seen
 This journey, of all journeys, which I just now walked,
 caused **my heart** the most **anguish**.

Teucer’s language demonstrates his extreme pain using the secondary language of *ania* and *algos* — note the superlatives *ἄλγιστον* (993) and *μάλιστα* (995). His opening words (his speech continues through 1039) describe not only the *hodos* (“road, path”) he took to get there, but also the *hodos* the pain takes as it enters through his eyes and makes its way to his deepest source of feeling, his *splanchnon*. Teucer repeats the sentiment that Ajax has left behind *ania*: “You perished, spreading like seeds so many sorrows for me” (ὄσας ἀνίας μοι κατασπείρας φθίνεις, 1005). The language of death (*phthineō*) directly after the language of begetting (*speirō*) is both ironic, since Ajax will no longer be spreading seeds of any sort, and also emphasizes how the *ania* results from Ajax’s death, which itself resulted from the sequence of events set in motion by Ajax’s *mania*. Thus, Teucer and

Tecmessa both describe the pain Ajax has left in the wake of his murderous *mania*, a suffering that will affect them long after the *nosos* has passed.

Ajax himself will not forget his pain, and thus not be healed, until he is dead. Knowing and remembering his actions are new sources of pain now that the *mania* has passed, as he expresses to his son Eurysaces: “The happiest life is when you know nothing, before you learn to rejoice and to suffer” (ἐν τῷ φρονεῖν γὰρ μηδὲν ἥδιστος βίος, | ἕως τὸ χαίρειν καὶ τὸ λυπεῖσθαι μάθης, 554-55). Ajax longs for the innocence of childhood, and more precisely the state of “knowing nothing.” Following his deception speech (646-692), Teucer’s arrival (719-721) and word of the prophecy from Calchas (749-755), which specifies that if Ajax comes out of his hut he will not survive, Ajax delivers his final speech with Hector’s sword in place (815-865). Ajax refers to the sorrow to come for his mother: “Poor woman, whenever she hears this report she will send forth great wailing into the whole city” (ἧ̃ που τάλαινα, τήνδ’ ὅταν κλύη φάτιν, | ἧσει μέγαν κωκυτὸν ἐν πάσῃ πόλει, 850-851). Not only have Ajax’s suicide and *mania* caused pain, but the memory of it causes pain as well: this brings up some interesting connections scholars have made concerning the relationship of the words *mania* and *mnēmē*. Yulia Ustinova argues that both *mania* and *mnēmē* are related to the Indo-European root **men-*, and that the two are further semantically related in meaning in Greek thought in the contexts of poetry, philosophy, and mystery initiations.¹⁰⁹ In the case of *Ajax*, Sophocles seems to suggest that this *mania* Ajax experiences results in a kind of forgetting: he lacks the ability to see the livestock for what they are, and the act of remembering this is too painful and disgraceful for life to continue. While Sophocles does not make this explicit, his character Tecmessa pleads with Ajax to remember her, to

¹⁰⁹ Ustinova 2012: 114-115.

remember the devastation he wreaked on her country, and thus, to remember his obligation to her (520-524):

Ἄλλ' ἴσχε κάμοῦ μνήστιν· ἀνδρί τοι χρεῶν
μνήμην προσεῖναι, τερπνὸν εἶ τί που πάθοι·
χάρις χάριν γάρ ἐστιν ἢ τίκτους' αἰεῖ·
ὄτου δ' ἀπορρεῖ μνήστις εὖ πεπονθότος,
οὐκ ἂν γένοιτ' ἔθ' οὗτος εὐγενῆς ἀνὴρ.

Keep a **memory** of me also: it is necessary for a man to **remember**, if he should experience some pleasure, that favor always gives birth to a favor. And whoever, after being treated well, lets the **memory** of it slip away, this man can no longer be a noble man.

Tecmessa urges Ajax to remember that he has obligations to her, just after he has expressed that his position is hopeless (473-480), and she links this memory of the pleasure she has brought him to the responsibility of repaying *charis* (“favor”) for *charis*: one cannot have the honor Ajax desires in 479-480 to die nobly (καλῶς τεθνηκέναι).¹¹⁰ Thus, Ajax’s rejection of the proper remembrance of *charis* results in a societal situation that begets more injustice in the second half of the play, when leadership wishes to deny him burial, and all of this is a result of a divine *mania* that inspires not *mnēmē*, but *lēthē* (“forgetting”).

Ustinova’s discussion of the connection between mystery initiations, memory, and *mania* dovetail with my interpretation of tragic drama as a parallel ritual to the practice of incubation in the Asclepeion. Her analysis shows the etymological and semantic connection in fifth-century texts between *mania* and memory, and implies a broader cultural connection between ritual and literary art. Sophocles’ presentation of a fictional *mania* and *nosos* in a mythological context familiar to his audience and related

¹¹⁰ Ajax uses the same word, εὐγενῆ to describe himself in the hypothetical scenario of life or death.

to other cultural products (e.g., vase paintings)¹¹¹ lures them into the fictional world, and catharsis is achieved not only by the suicide of Ajax, who must die since healing is not possible for him, but by his ultimate burial, which is achieved only through the intervention of Odysseus and the cooperation of Ajax's surviving kin with him. Sophocles shows through the speeches of Tecmessa, Teucer, and the Chorus that Ajax's *nosos/mania* affect the entire community, and the pain and suffering persists even when the delusion Athena imposed on Ajax is lifted.

Social Context: Friends and Enemies

The interactions between Ajax and his *philoï*, as well as the interactions between his surviving family and his enemies (Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus) after his death, offer some interesting insights in terms of the social context of the cathartic drama that Sophocles offers. Blundell analyzes the play in terms of the helping friends/harming enemies ethical model, showing that Ajax, Agamemnon, and Menelaus rigidly interpret this model as permanent, while Odysseus eschews inherited hostility. Odysseus then creates a new paradigm for the helping friends/harming enemies model that places community needs first and offers an opportunity to bury a Greek hero.¹¹² I interpret the conflict over Ajax's burial between Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus in the second half of the play as a conflict about how to create catharsis. The prevalence of *philos/echthros* type words suggest that there is indeed a struggle in this play over how to deal with the usual ethical paradigm (helping friends/harming enemies) in a situation so devastating as this, when a former *philos* intended to slaughter his fellow leaders. I argue

¹¹¹ See Ustinova 2012: 113-114; 124-125 for discussion on the depiction of madness on vase paintings, together with drawings of select examples.

¹¹² Blundell 1989: 95-105; See n. 51 on the specific form of burial in *Ajax*.

that in light of the previous analysis of Ajax's *nosos/mania*, the question over burial involves cathartic purgation as well as ethics, and that the need to bury him together as a group, with outward harmony of intent and action, is a way for Sophocles to show the need for community catharsis following the experience of *nosos/mania* in the first half of the play.

Copious uses of the terms *monos* ("alone") *philos* ("friend") and *echthros* ("enemy") as well verb forms from *miseō* ("to hate") show how socially isolated Ajax has become prior to this event. Considered an enemy in his own ranks, Ajax feels no differently towards his own countrymen than he did towards the Trojan Hector. Odysseus is referred to as Ajax's adversary (*enstatēs*, 104, occurring only here in fifth-century literature).¹¹³ Ajax is described as *monos* by Athena twice: he is rushing alone (29); he sets out by night, alone, treacherously (47). Ajax describes himself as hated by the gods (θεοῖς ἐχθαίρομαι, 457-458) as well as the Greek army (μισεῖ δέ μ' Ἑλλήνων στρατός, 458). Even the landscape of Troy has animosity toward him (ἐχθει δὲ Τροία πᾶσα καὶ πεδία τάδε, 459). Ajax refers to *monomachia*, or "single combat," in a hypothetical bid for redemption: "Well then, should I go against the guard-line of Trojans, attacking alone in single combats, and by doing something useful, then finally die?" (ἀλλὰ δῆτ' ἰὼν πρὸς ἔρυμα Τρώων, ξυμπεσὼν μόνος μόνους καὶ δρῶν τι χρηστόν, εἶτα λοίσθιον θάνω; 466-468). In another instance, Teucer refers to a *monomachia* that already took place between Ajax and Hector (recounted in *Iliad* 15) when the ships were on fire: "This man alone came and jumped up," (ἐρρύσατ' ἐλθὼν μοῦνος, 1276). Ajax conceives of himself as a

¹¹³ Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996 list one other instance of this noun in Aelius Aristides, fragment 238. Stanford 1963: 70-71 comments that this rare noun is formed like ἐπιστάτης, literally one who stands above, and suggests that the intention for Athena's use of the word could be to imply that Odysseus is merely an obstacle and not a worthy rival.

lone fighter, a sole defender of the Greeks, and someone cast out not just by the Greek leadership, but by the entire army (μισεῖ δέ μ' Ἑλλήνων στρατός, 458) and the land itself (ἔχθει δὲ Τροία πᾶσα καὶ πεδία τάδε, 459). It seems that everyone Ajax once considered a *philos* has now become *echthros*, and in the meantime, the gift from his enemy Hector has become a friend, the instrument of his suicide that renders him permanently alone. Teucer endorses this assessment, even considering his own presence fighting with Ajax against Hector in *Iliad* 15. Teucer also applies the term *monos* to Odysseus as the only one standing up for Ajax in the burial debate (μόνος παρέστης χερσίν, 1384). While hatred and isolation become permanent states for Ajax, Odysseus navigates between friendship and enmity with deft skill. But this friendship between Odysseus and Ajax (in death) alone is not capable of producing a satisfactory outcome: it is only Odysseus' ability to convince Agamemnon and Menelaus to proceed with burial and for all to grieve in turn that allows the army to move on.

Sophocles' portrayal of Odysseus is consistent with the *Odyssey* and *Philoctetes*, at least in one respect: the character of Odysseus continually seeks the most advantage for the most people. Though he knows Ajax considered him an enemy in life, Odysseus uses the term *dusmenēs* to describe Ajax (18), responding to Athena's use of *echthros*.¹¹⁴ As Odysseus sees it, Ajax is hostile toward him, but they are not proper enemies. Blundell argues that the term *dusmenēs* refers to a one-sided enmity.¹¹⁵ That is, Odysseus uses it to acknowledge that Ajax considers him an enemy, but he does not: otherwise he would use the term *echthros*, as Athena does. He shows this by defending Ajax's corpse

¹¹⁴ Odysseus does later refer to Ajax as “most hated of the whole army to me” (κάμοι... ἔχθιστος στρατοῦ, 1336), though he is speaking with Agamemnon at this time and directing his rhetorical approach accordingly.

¹¹⁵ Blundell 1989: 63.

in the second half of the play against Menelaus and Agamemnon. This stance seems to be in stark contrast to the Odysseus who appears in *Philoctetes* who marooned an injured *philos* on a desert island; but the disparity between the two instantiations of his character are consistent if we consider his actions as part of a model of “subtle variety of self-interest,” as Blundell labels it, or, as it is more positively characterized by Stanford: “the enlightened egoism of classical humanism.”¹¹⁶ Odysseus certainly reacts more compassionately to Ajax’s plight than Agamemnon or Menelaus, and he far surpasses Athena in pity and kindness towards him (88). Odysseus accurately assesses each situation, without allowing the hatred Ajax might have indulged to cloud his judgment: he acknowledges Ajax’s excellence as second only to Achilles: “I would not dishonor him in such a way as to deny that I know he is the most excellent of the Argives who arrived at Troy except for Achilles” (οὐ τᾶν ἀτιμάσαιμ’ ἄν, ὥστε μὴ λέγειν | ἐν’ ἄνδρ’ ἰδεῖν ἄριστον Ἀργείων, ὅσοι | Τροίαν ἀφικόμεσθα, πλὴν Ἀχιλλέως, 1340-1341). Odysseus further identifies clearly the injustice of refusing burial to a noble man (ἐσθλός, 1345). By not burying Ajax, Agamemnon would in fact destroy the laws of the gods (οὐ γὰρ τι τοῦτον, ἀλλὰ τοὺς θεῶν νόμους | φθειροῖς ἄν, 1343-1344a). Odysseus, who has the greatest reason of anyone to wish ill upon Ajax, his family, or his corpse, considers that the excellence of Ajax outweighs his enmity (νικᾷ γὰρ ἀρετὴ με τῆς ἔχθρας πλέον, 1357). In response, Agamemnon claims “These kinds of mortals are inconstant” (τοιοῖδε μέντοι φῶτες ἔμπληκτοι βροτῶν, 1358).¹¹⁷ Odysseus responds by demonstrating the constancy

¹¹⁶ Blundell 1989: 99; Stanford 1963: 74.

¹¹⁷ The OCT reads οὐπληκτοι here, supplemented by Blaydes. Stanford 1963 and Jebb 1908 print ἔμπληκτοι, which would be the first occurrence of the adjective. Either way, the meaning is similar and as Stanford 1963: 227 points out, recalls the epithet πολύτροπος in *Odyssey*, though ἔμπληκτοι never seems to have a positive connotation, as πολύτροπος can, such as “versatile.” Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996 list Attic meaning of ἔμπληκτοι as “impulsive,” “capricious,” or “unstable,” and cites another tragic use of the word in Euripides refers to the inconstancy of fate, supporting my translation “inconstant.” See also

of his “subtle self-interest” by asking “For whom would it be more likely that I work for than myself?” (τῷ γάρ με μᾶλλον εἰκὸς ἢ ‘μαυτῷ πονεῖν; 1367) Odysseus shows that unlike Ajax, his ability to navigate between friendship and enmity depends on the value of doing so at any particular time. Some may see that as inconsistent, others see it as wise (*sophos*) as the chorus exclaims: “Odysseus, whoever says that you are not wise in judgment is foolish, when you are such a man as this!” (ὄστις σ’, Ὀδυσσεῦ, μὴ λέγει γνώμη σοφὸν | φῦναι, τοιοῦτον ὄντα, μῶρός ἐστ’ ἄνηρ, 1374-1375). Odysseus thus demonstrates his wisdom in knowing when to consider someone an enemy, and when to consider them a friend. Ajax’s interpretation of their relationship does not demonstrate an ability to change his mind about whether someone is an enemy or a friend.

Ajax’s inability to navigate a relationship that might be more complex than friend/enemy is not a result of a lack of awareness that other possibilities for societal relationships exist. Ajax knows that there are other options and implies that he has come around to the idea of being sensible (σωφρονεῖν, 677) but his suicide demonstrates his rigid interpretation of his relationship with Odysseus. Ajax is consistent in his incapacity to let an insult slide or to change his perspective: once an *echthros*, always an *echthros* (677-683):

ἡμεῖς δὲ πῶς οὐ γνωσόμεσθα σωφρονεῖν;
 Ἐγὼ δ', ἐπίσταμαι γὰρ ἀρτίως ὅτι
 ὃ τ' ἐχθρὸς ἡμῖν ἐς τοσόνδ' ἐχθαρτέος,
 ὡς καὶ φιλήσων αὐτίς, ἔς τε τὸν φίλον
 τοσαῦθ' ὑπουργῶν ὠφελεῖν βουλήσομαι,
 ὡς αἰὲν οὐ μενοῦντα· τοῖς πολλοῖσι γὰρ
 βροτῶν ἄπιστός ἐσθ' ἑταιρείας λιμήν.

Winnington-Ingram 1980: 69, who believes that this adjective does not refer to Odysseus, since Odysseus has demonstrated his consistency in the application of *philia* to Agamemnon, however, Winnington-Ingram here seems to project his own reasoning onto Agamemnon: taken in context it seems abundantly clear that Agamemnon’s comment refers directly to Odysseus’ comment that in death, Ajax ought to be treated as a *philos*.

How will we not understand how to be sensible?
I at least will, for I am aware just now that
someone who is an enemy to me ought to be hated only so much
as even someone who will become a friend in turn,
and for a friend I will wish to help and support just as much
as if he would not always stay a friend. For to most mortals,
the harbor of friendship is untrustworthy.

Ajax articulates the tension present in navigating a friendship in the way that Odysseus does, seemingly suggesting that his understanding of being sensible (σωφρονεῖν, 677) in the context of friends/enemies means that you set up limits for yourself not only in hatred, but also in helping and supporting friends. Stanford interprets Ajax here as viewing “with dislike and contempt the time-serving opportunism which can be a feature of popular politicians. If this is the brave, new world, he would prefer not to stay in it.”¹¹⁸ That may be true, but Ajax does seem to betray a bit of self-awareness with his initial question: “How will we not understand how to be sensible?” (677). He seems conscious of an alternative to his behavior and demonstrates his ability to understand and even perform *sōphrosunē* (the noun associated with the verb he uses in 677). His speech betrays his knowledge of what he could do to remedy his actions done in the throes of *nosos*: he says he feels pity for Tecmessa and Eurysaces, since he is leaving them an orphan and widow (652-653), he suggests that he will ritually cleanse his body in order to escape the wrath of Athena (654-656), and that he will bury his sword (657-660), and that he must learn to yield to the gods and show respect to the sons of Atreus (666-667). Ajax then visualizes an alternative scenario in which he successfully moves on from the *nosos*, ritually washing himself (ἀγνίσας, 655) and thus escaping Athena’s wrath (μῆνιν, 656). This virtue Ajax refers to in his question (677), *sōphrosunē*, seems to be used to refer to

¹¹⁸ Stanford 1963: 149.

the ability to properly treat people as *philoï* and *echthroï* when it is appropriate: a pragmatic human concern that I have translated as “sensible.” Ajax continues to isolate himself, identifying himself as the *nosos* that requires treatment in 581b-582: “It is not appropriate for a skillful doctor to sing incantations over a malady that requires surgery” (οὐ πρὸς ἰατροῦ σοφοῦ | θρηνεῖν ἐπωδὰς πρὸς τομῶντι πῆματι). The only catharsis achieved by Ajax is surgical removal, but Odysseus and the chorus move toward a process that includes burial, mourning, and resolution.

Ultimately Ajax knows a man of his constitution will not thrive in this world of fluid relationships, tinging the virtue in question with the slightly ambiguous Odyssean flavor of *polutropos*. Odysseus advocates for Ajax’s burial in the strongest possible terms: “In order that he may not be dishonored by you unjustly, since you would destroy him not at all, but the customs of the gods” (ὥστ’ οὐκ ἄν ἐνδίκως γ’ ἀτιμάζοιτό σοι· | οὐ γάρ τι τοῦτον, ἀλλὰ τοὺς θεῶν νόμους | φθείροις ἄν, 1342-1344). This custom of burial is a rite Ajax assumed he would be provided, marked by the use of the future perfect tense when he declares: “The rest of the armor will have been buried with me” (τὰ δ’ ἄλλα τεύχη κοῖν’ ἐμοὶ τεθάψεται, 577). Odysseus also sees this burial rite as something expected for a man like Ajax: “It is not just to harm a man if he is dead, even if you happen to hate him” (ἄνδρα δ’ οὐ δίκαιον, εἰ θάνοι, βλάπτειν τὸν ἐσθλόν, οὐδ’ ἐὰν μισῶν κυρῆς, 1344-1345). Both Odysseus and Ajax seem to recognize that the way for the army and Ajax’s family (Teucer, Tecmessa, and Eurysaces) to move on is to bury him properly. Through their words, Sophocles emphasizes the importance of burial as a sort of cathartic custom, and the emphasis placed on navigating between treating others as friends and enemies in different situations, articulated as well by both heroes, shows that

a rigid interpretation of this system ought to be buried along with Ajax, in order for catharsis to take place.

Odysseus brings catharsis to the Greek army by successfully persuading the Atreidae to allow Teucer to bury Ajax. Scholars have made much of how Odysseus' role in verbal exchanges in the second half of the play marks a paradigm shift between the heroic age of Ajax and the fifth-century democratic, Athenian figure of Odysseus.¹¹⁹ This is a key point, though it seems that the fluidity of the figure of Odysseus, considering his much less positive portrayal in *Philoctetes*, shows that this paradigm shift does not depend on one figure alone. Further, Odysseus' goal is to reinforce the *nomos* ("custom") of burying dead comrades that was already in place. My interpretation allows for Odysseus to have mutability and for Ajax to as well, since Ajax becomes at least self-aware enough to acknowledge the questionable future of the *philos/echthros* mode of ethics and to simultaneously acknowledge his inability to adjust to a less dogmatic ethical and social system of compartmentalizing individuals. Ajax's self-cauterization from the army by suicide and Odysseus' persuasion both work to provide catharsis for the Greek army: catharsis of a system of ethics (helping friends/harming enemies) that does not allow for relationships to evolve.

¹¹⁹ Knox 1961: 3: "A heroic age has passed away, to be succeeded by one in which action is replaced by argument, stubbornness by compromise, defiance by acceptance." See also Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 23-28 on the tension between systems of justice (*dikē*) in the heroic age and the historical moment of tragedy. Hesk 2007: 72-91 expands on this tension between what he calls the Homeric-heroic setting (74) and the political culture of fifth-century Athens. See also Hawthorne 2012, who argues that Odysseus directs the *agon* with Agamemnon to a consideration of Odysseus' *philia* with Ajax, thus allowing Agamemnon to grant Ajax's burial as a favor to Odysseus while maintaining his own enmity toward Ajax. Heath and Okell 2007 interpret Odysseus through the lens of *Iliad* 1, arguing that Odysseus's third-party mediation between Tecuer and the Atreidae is consistent with the role of the mediator in Homer as necessary when conflicting values result in an impasse.

Conclusion

Sophocles verbally calls attention to the eventual catharsis accomplished in *Ajax* through removal of the offending *nosos* embodied in the eponymous hero, the use of verbs of suffering, and *philos/echthros* language. Tecmessa uses these verbal signals together, reinforced by the adjective *koinos*, when she asks the chorus a hypothetical question related to Ajax's *mania* (263-268):

Chorus: Ἄλλ' εἰ πέπαυται, κάρτ' ἄν εὐτυχεῖν δοκῶ·
φρούδου γὰρ ἤδη τοῦ κακοῦ μείων λόγος.

Tecmessa: Πότερα δ' ἄν, εἰ νέμοι τις αἴρεσιν, λάβοις,
φίλους ἀνιῶν αὐτὸς ἡδονὰς ἔχειν
ἢ κοινὸς ἐν κοινοῖσι λυπεῖσθαι ξυνῶν;

Chorus: Τό τοι διπλάζον, ὧ γύναι, μειζρον κακόν.

Chorus: But if it has ceased, I think surely all will be well.
For if the evil has fled, it is of less account.

Tecmessa: Which would you choose, if the choice were given,
while causing pain your **friends**, to have pleasure yourself,
or **share with them, feeling their pain together?**

Chorus: The double pain indeed, woman, is the greater evil.

Tecmessa cuts to the heart of the issues explored in the play with a single question. Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Athena delighted in Ajax's *mania*. Agamemnon and Menelaus were so quick to abandon him that they were willing to deny him burial, despite his many valiant deeds of heroism in the Trojan War. Though the chorus here takes the position that suffering all around is worse than letting a friend suffer alone (remaining happy yourself), it becomes clear that Odysseus's approach is favored by Sophocles' plot design. Odysseus pities Ajax (121-2) and understands the larger picture for mortals: that life is nothing but breath and shadow (125-6). Pain, illness, and suffering

are part of this mortal life, but sharing these things together at least offers a measure of healing and solidarity, and bitterness toward fallen enemies is useless.¹²⁰

The play ends with Teucer and Odysseus as *philoï*,¹²¹ and Teucer directing the burial of Ajax. The Greek army is cleansed of the bitterness and anger Ajax held onto, and the obstinate systems of *philos/echthros* ethics, as well as the stain of ignoring the proper *nomos* of burying the noble man.¹²² Sophocles thus achieves a cathartic ending, and this is shown through the nosological language employed throughout the play and the social change achieved by Odysseus. Through Odysseus, who not only expresses his pity for the fallen hero and his fear of Ajax's *mania*, but also channels those emotions into positive action, away from shameful *Schadenfreude*, Sophocles reinforces the heroic social mores that he values. One of those values, the burial of the dead, is emphatically reinforced, while at the same time he supports modifying those mores which are no longer of use, like the *philos/echthros* system of relationships.

Although *Ajax* was performed well before the arrival of the cult of Asclepius in Athens, it seems likely, given Sophocles' reputation for Dexion (whether factual or not) that Sophocles was aware of the cult's practices, since he was a member of the Athenian elite.¹²³ Mitchell-Boyask has previously argued that the persistence of nosological imagery in Athenian drama corresponds to the plague and to the subsequent arrival of

¹²⁰ Ajax himself holds onto a deep-seated grudge toward Hector throughout the play, calling him *δυσμενεστάτου* and *ἐμοὶ μάλιστα μισηθέντος ἐχθίστου θ' ὄραν*. (662, 816b-17)), and he symbolically fell on Hector's sword.

¹²¹ Teucer properly addresses Odysseus as *ἄριστ* (1381), and calls him *ἔσθλός* (1399), and he labels him respectfully as the son of Laertes in 1393 (Ajax refers to him as a son of Sisyphus 189, and he is also referred to as such in *Philoctetes* 417 and 1311).

¹²² Despite the lack of cremation which was the custom in Homer, the *nomos* appears to include either inhumation or cremation as a possibility: see Holt 1992: 320-323.

¹²³ See Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 105.

Asclepius in Athens,¹²⁴ and I diverge from this argument only in my emphasis on the relationship between healing and catharsis that I find present in Sophoclean drama. Despite the connection between Ajax and a sympathetic son of Asclepius, Podalirius, I do not conclude that *Ajax* represents a self-conscious depiction of fictional healing through drama as parallel to the ritual in the Asclepeion as I do for *Philoctetes*.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, I do argue that the cathartic awareness Sophocles demonstrates in *Ajax*, which I have explored in this chapter, shows the development of the idea of drama as healing, which is further developed as a healing ritual parallel to Asclepian dream healing later in the fifth century.

¹²⁴ Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 45.

¹²⁵ Edelstein 1998: T141: 67-68.

CHAPTER 2: Illness and Catharsis in *Philoctetes*

Introduction

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* accomplishes catharsis through drama in a process that mirrors the ritual of healing through a dream. In Chapter 1, I showed how Sophocles develops his idea of catharsis in *Ajax* but did not argue for an explicit connection to the cult of Asclepius. In this chapter, I read *Philoctetes* as intentionally mirroring the Asclepian process of dream healing. I show how Sophocles achieves this mirroring through nosological language, eremitic language, and the setting of Lemnos. Through this analysis, we can more fully understand the concept of catharsis in fifth-century Greek thought. Scholars working in psychoanalytic criticism have suggested the possibility that the theater may serve as a setting for the psychological process similar to the way a dream functions in psychoanalytic theory.¹²⁶ My analysis addresses how “drama as dream” may be illuminated by the use of the term catharsis in Aristotle's *Poetics*,¹²⁷ where catharsis suggests both a medical and religious process not unlike what is now termed narrative therapy.¹²⁸ To do this, this chapter first analyzes the nosological language of the play: Philoctetes describes his *nosos* (“illness”) vividly, and other characters react in kind with further striking descriptions. This chapter next considers the eremitic language of the play, that is, the language of loneliness and isolation,¹²⁹ and specifically focuses on how that language compounds the effect of the nosological

¹²⁶ See Winnicott 1971:1-114 for his theory of how individuals use objects of play, dreaming, or fantasy as transitional objects to form identity; he further hypothesizes a similar process to be at work in drama. Griffith 2005: 98-110 elaborates on this theory in Greek tragedy.

¹²⁷ Aristotle *Poetics* 1449b21-28.

¹²⁸ Narrative therapy as a therapeutic practice was developed by White and Epston 1990.

¹²⁹ Rehm 2002: 138 uses the phrase “eremitic space” to describe the island of Lemnos; I extend the use of the term to describe the language Sophocles uses to portray the isolation of Philoctetes.

language to heighten the *pathos* of Philoctetes and his situation. Subsequently, as part of analyzing the overall eremitic effect of the play, I examine Sophocles' choice to set the drama on the island of Lemnos. In this section, I first study what effect portraying the island as uninhabited has in focusing the attention on Philoctetes, and how that can be interpreted in terms of the city of Athens. Next, I review the various mythological connections the island has with divine figures and rituals that both link to Philoctetes and contribute to the cathartic effect of the play's dramatic ending.

While the language of physical suffering and isolation in the play is ubiquitous, the tragic quality of *Philoctetes* continues to be a debated topic in scholarship. J. T. Sheppard brands *Philoctetes* "a delightful romance,"¹³⁰ more recently, Seth Schein describes the play's genre as "complex," and explains: "Generically, the play is a romance rather than a tragedy and it ends problematically, as romance often does, leaving audiences and readers divided in their responses and unsure of their moral bearings."¹³¹ In a similar vein, Suzanne Gelin states: "There is no doubt that *Philoctetes* is not a tragedy in the same sense as are the earlier plays. A tragedy about two interesting men in an interesting situation will be far from having the tragic expansion of those plays of Sophocles in which all human nature writhed on the stage under the transfiguring power of evil and suffering."¹³² While *Philoctetes* is categorically set apart from earlier Sophoclean narratives of matricide, parricide, suicide (or multiple suicides, as in *Antigone*), somehow the play still stirs many of the same emotions in the audience on behalf of the protagonist. We feel outraged at his unjust treatment (as we may feel for Antigone, Ajax, Electra, and perhaps Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*), and we feel pity

¹³⁰ Sheppard 1963: 78.

¹³¹ Schein 2012: 431, 436.

¹³² Gelin 1959: 8.

for his physical pain (as we would feel for Heracles and Oedipus). Moreover, the nosological and eremitic language used by Sophocles in *Philoctetes* taps into Athenian human anxiety around abandonment, rejection, and suffering. But as much as we sympathize with Philoctetes, we cannot help but be frustrated when Sophocles' narrative reveals his main character's refusal to accompany Neoptolemus and Odysseus to Troy, where Neoptolemus promises he will receive healing and become the hero he is meant to be.

Despite these frustrations, the play has undeniable *pathos*, particularly during Philoctetes' attacks of pain, but it can be argued that the *deus ex machina* of Heracles and the implied victory in Troy do not seem to offer the audience the powerful Aristotelian catharsis we might expect from Sophocles. Yet some aspects of *Philoctetes* do recall other plot devices in the tragedies of Sophocles: a mistake is made, and horrible consequences are suffered. In *Philoctetes* we encounter a stubborn tragic hero embittered toward his superiors, physically exhausted and overcome with pain, and fearful of potential abandonment. Bitten by a snake, Philoctetes suffers from a festering wound, resulting in his abandonment and continued illness. The ending of the play, however, unlike many of Sophocles' other plays, is not catastrophic; rather it seems to be a culmination of a series of misfired endings and character appearances that finally resolve the plot through the intervention of the Philoctetes' ultimate hero, Heracles.¹³³ After retrieving Philoctetes and his bow, Neoptolemus and Odysseus head off to Troy and the drama implies that they are successful in their goal of fulfilling the requirements to take the city as prophesied by Helenus.

¹³³ In the Greek mythological tradition, Philoctetes, at Heracles' request, lit his funeral pyre and received his bow and arrows in return. No one else, including Heracles' son Hyllus, had the courage to light his pyre. An account of this story can be found in Diodorus' *Historiae* IV.38 in Oldfather 1939.

Robin Mitchell-Boyask discusses nosological language specifically in the *Philoctetes* and elsewhere in both Sophoclean and Euripidean drama, and notes how the frequency and impact of this language cements the connection between tragic drama and the cult of Asclepius.¹³⁴ My study takes this discussion further, in order to show that the *Philoctetes* as a cathartic experience functions as a psychologically healing fiction for the city of Athens, and one that calls attention to that process with its use of the themes and language of sickness. This collective cathartic experience of healing through tragic fiction, I argue, is ultimately parallel to the Asclepian ritual of incubation in the *abatón*, sought and experienced primarily by individuals. In the performance of *Philoctetes*, Sophocles reveals the cure to the city and stimulates cathartic healing through his use of nosological language as well as the staging of the play, which draws attention to the isolation of Philoctetes as it also deictically reminds the audience of the proximity of the theater to the temple of Asclepius. Exploring these issues through tragic drama can be thought of as another form of incubating the city to reveal the cure, just as an individual would dream of a cure in the *abatón* at the temple of Asclepius.

Illness: Nosological Language in *Philoctetes*

The language of *Philoctetes* is replete with references to illness. The word *nosos* is frequently used in *Philoctetes*: it appears twenty-six times in various forms in *Philoctetes*, as compared to thirteen times in *Ajax* and eighteen in *Trachiniae*.¹³⁵ Odysseus begins the play by announcing the setting and the physical state of Philoctetes when alone on Lemnos (*Philoctetes* 1-11):

¹³⁴ See Mitchell-Boyask 2008 and 2012.

¹³⁵ Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 29.

Ἀκτὴ μὲν ἦδε τῆς περιρρύτου χθονὸς
Λήμνου, βροτοῖς ἄστιπτος οὐδ' οἰκουμένη,
ἔνθ', ὧ κρατίστου πατρὸς Ἑλλήνων τραφεῖς
Ἀχιλλέως παῖ Νεοπτόλεμε, τὸν Μηλιᾶ
Ποίαντος υἱὸν ἐξέθηκ' ἐγὼ ποτε,
ταχθεῖς τόδ' ἔρδειν τῶν ἀνασσόντων ὕπο,
νόσῳ καταστάζοντα διαβόρῳ πόδα·
ὄτ' οὔτε λειβῆς ἡμῖν οὔτε θυμάτων
παρῆν ἐκήλοις προσθιγεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀγρίαῖς
κατεῖχ' ἀεὶ πᾶν στρατόπεδον δυσφημίαις,
βοῶν, ἰύζων.

This is the shore of the sea-girt land of Lemnos,
untrodden by mortals, and uninhabited,
Here, Neoptolemus, child bred of a father
who was the mightiest of the Greeks, Achilles,
here I exposed the Malian, son of Poeas, long ago,
ordered to do this by those in charge,
with his foot dripping down with a thoroughly consuming illness,
since we could neither pour libations
nor prepare the sacrifice in peace, but with his savage cries
he had a constant grip on the whole camp,
shouting and crying out.

As Neoptolemus and Odysseus arrive, Odysseus explains the circumstances of Philoctetes' abandonment. Odysseus admits his responsibility for Philoctetes' plight: "I exposed him here," (ἐξέθηκ' ἐγὼ, 5),¹³⁶ but qualifies that it was in accordance with orders: "ordered to do this by those in charge," (ταχθεῖς τόδ' ἔρδειν τῶν ἀνασσόντων ὕπο, 6). Next, Odysseus provides the reason for abandoning the wounded hero: his foot is "dripping down with a thoroughly consuming illness" (νόσῳ καταστάζοντα διαβόρῳ πόδα, 7), a *nosos* that prevents proper sacrifices due to Philoctetes' "savage cries" (ἀγρίαῖς ... δυσφημίαις, 9-10). Sophocles' use in line 7 of the intensifying prefix κατά

¹³⁶ Webster 1970: 67 notes the use of the verb τίθημι with the prefix ἐξ is the same verb used of abandoning and exposing babies in contemporary texts, highlighting the horror of such a thing being done to a fellow-soldier, a *philos*, and male of equal status. In his analysis of this verb in *Philoctetes*, Vidal-Naquet in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 166 adds that exposure typically takes place in an "alien and hostile space of the *agros*."

with the verb *στάζω* — a verb frequently used of tears, and dripping blood from an altar, or head and hands dripping with sweat, as at *Ajax* 10 — paints a vivid picture of an illness with intense physicality.¹³⁷ In her study of how the Greek conception of consciousness is represented in tragedy, Ruth Padel points out: “Words compounded with ‘falling’ and ‘dripping’ are common both to Hippocratic images of flux and to tragedy’s account of passion.”¹³⁸ The connection between dripping, liquid disease in Hippocratic texts with leaking emotion in poetry is especially important to note in *Philoctetes*, where not only is the dripping due to an actual *nosos* in the medical sense, but also the use of the word in a poetic context evokes the liquidity of emotional pain as well, as in a phrase used by the chorus in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (179-80): “in sleep, trouble that brings memory of pain drips before the heart,” (*στάζει δ’ ἔν θ’ ὕπνου πρὸ καρδίας / μνησιπήμων πόνος*),¹³⁹ In this brief phrase, Aeschylus uses the same verb Sophocles uses of *Philoctetes*’ *nosos* (*στάζω*) to describe the way remembering a troublesome event evokes emotional pain and prevents sleep.

In addition, the unusual adjective *διαβόρω*, “thoroughly devouring” (7), is used elsewhere in classical Greek literature, but only by Sophocles: it occurs twice in *Trachiniae*, once to describe the *nosos* that torments Heracles (1084), and earlier in the play of the strange decomposition of the bit of wool (*εὐείρω πόκω*, 676) that Deianeira

¹³⁷ In *Ajax*, the title character’s physical state is described by Athena in her opening speech to Odysseus (9-10): “For the man just now happens to be inside, dripping with sweat from his head and his sword-slaughtering hands” (*ἔνδον γὰρ ἀνὴρ ἄρτι τυγχάνει, κάρα στάζων ἰδρῶτι καὶ χέρας ξιφοκτόνους*).

¹³⁸ Padel 1992: 83.

¹³⁹ For the text of Aeschylus, see Page 1973. See also Cyrino 1995: 49-50 for her discussion of the verb *εἴβω* used in Homer for the dripping of tears, but also a verb that portrays an event that dilutes the body and threatens physical integrity as it describes the emotional experience of weeping.

uses to transfer the deadly poison to Heracles' garment.¹⁴⁰ This adjective is formed by combining the intensifying *διά* prefix with a derivative of the verb *βιβρώσκω* meaning "to consume, to eat up." The verb can be found in the Hippocratic texts as well as in other contexts simply of eating meat.¹⁴¹ Plato uses it in *Timaeus* with the prefix *διά* to describe decomposing flesh.¹⁴² Here in Odysseus' opening lines, Sophocles uses these descriptive verbs, intensifying prefixes, and adjectives to set up the nosological language in the rest of the play, and to characterize Philoctetes' suffering as intensely physical and repulsive, while showing the culpability of the leadership for abandoning Philoctetes alone on the uninhabited island.

While many scholars have noted Sophocles' descriptive power in *Philoctetes*, Nancy Worman specifically highlights the visceral language he uses to describe Philoctetes' suffering from his wound: it is burdensome, heavy, consuming, and devouring.¹⁴³ This language serves to emphasize the consuming suffering of Philoctetes' *nosos* in order to arouse intense emotions of pity and fear in the audience. It is important to note also that the pity (*ἔλεος*) discussed in Aristotle and subsequently referenced by literary critics is stronger than "feeling sorry" for someone or "Christian compassion."¹⁴⁴ As David Konstan claims: "Greek pity was not an instinctive response to another person's pain, but depended on a judgment of whether the other's suffering was deserved

¹⁴⁰ Of the garment causing Heracles' *nosos*: *Trachiniae* 676; of the *nosos* itself: *Trachiniae* 1084. Diogenes Laertius uses the adjective in an epigram composed for Sophocles, so it is likely he is consciously employing it to honor the poet: see *Vitae Philosophorum* 4.20 in Marcovich 1999.

¹⁴¹ See in Jones 1923: *Regimen in Acute Diseases* §38.

¹⁴² See *Timaeus* 83a in Bury 1929.

¹⁴³ On the vivid language used to depict the illness, see Worman 2000: 10-12.

¹⁴⁴ The phrase "Christian compassion" is from Segal 1996: 164, who has a similar thought on the expression as he discusses Gorgias' use of "pity" (*ἔλεος πολύδακρυς*): "Gorgias' language reminds us that Aristotle's notion of pity probably involves a stronger, more violent and invasive emotion than ours, tinged as ours is by Christian notions of mercy and compassion."

or not.”¹⁴⁵ This is therefore a more considered emotion than simply a reaction to an ill person: this is a reaction to a person suffering unfairly. Fear accompanies pity because the feeling of despondency experienced by the audience when faced with a character in a position like Philoctetes is more about the spectator than the protagonist; that is, the audience fears his fate because he is human, and they are all too aware of how easy it is to suffer the same fate due to human error and helplessness in the face of amoral authority figures.

Alongside the arousal of pity and fear, Jennifer Clarke Kosak suggests that the intensity of Sophocles’ depiction of Philoctetes’ *nosos* could be a means of feminizing him, allowing the audience to distance themselves from him while also sympathizing with him: “It is rather the disease, the *nosos*, attempting to penetrate deep into Philoctetes’ body and take over his conscious mind, that threatens Philoctetes’ autonomy and selfhood and takes the place of the ‘other.’ Moreover, it is a female force, the ‘savage-minded’ (194) goddess Chryse, who is responsible for Philoctetes’ punishment.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the *nosos* is emasculating but also wild and uncontrollable, aspects of the disease that would inspire fears about masculine identity in a mostly male Athenian audience.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, as Konstan describes it, the experience of pity is the ability to acknowledge one’s similarity to the sufferer while remaining distant enough to make judgments on the character of the sufferer.¹⁴⁸ Establishing this distance is crucial: the setting on Lemnos (as discussed later in this chapter) works further to enable the audience

¹⁴⁵ Konstan 2006: 201.

¹⁴⁶ Kosak 2006: 50.

¹⁴⁷ Zeitlin 1990a discusses the phenomenon of “playing the other” by which men in Greek tragedy are feminized. Curiously, though *Ajax* is discussed in these terms, Zeitlin does not analyze whether Philoctetes “plays the other.”

¹⁴⁸ Konstan 2006: 201-202 even suggests that this detachment could more closely resemble the feeling we term “contempt” than what we think of as “pity.”

to distance themselves from the protagonist, while also allowing for the emotion of pity at his situation, since Lemnos has significance for Athenians as an allied *polis* and an important religious site for purification, but — as depicted by Sophocles in *Philoctetes* — is distant both geographically and temporally. Thus, Sophocles provides the audience an outlet for their own anxieties about the potentially feminizing effects of illness, which threatens autonomy and masculine identity as it renders Philoctetes as “Other”; and by placing the action at a distance, Sophocles gives the audience an opportunity to make judgments about his choices and circumstances.

Throughout the play, Sophocles has other characters describe Philoctetes’ *nosos* as savage (ἀγρίαν, 173, 265), continually growing and getting stronger (ἀεὶ τεθήλε καὶ πλεονέχον ἔρχεται, 259), insatiable (ἀδηφάγον, 313), *thumos*-vexing (δακέθυμος, 106), and even disgusting (δυσχέρεια, 900). Sophocles reiterates the violence of Philoctetes’ *nosos* — as well as his savage cries, which Odysseus complained about in lines 9-10 — to emphasize his separation from society and his wild state of living, apart from the regularities of sacrifice, government, and family. Philoctetes’ physical wound is both disgusting and insatiable, not moderated whatsoever by the tempering forces of polite society. Additionally, Philoctetes himself performs what may be labeled as “savage cries” while in the midst of a painful attack of oozing blood (κηκῖον αἷμα, 784): he shouts παππαπαππαπαῖ (754) as well as παπαῖ several times (785-786, 793) and later, ἄτταταῖ (790). Nancy Worman points out how his “verbal leakage” can be compared with his leaking wound: “At certain points in the drama, the hero’s voice even seems infested by a verbal leakage from his wound to his words, which then affects attempts by others to

describe his affliction.”¹⁴⁹ Elaine Scarry argues for the universality of Philoctetes’ inability to articulate his pain: “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”¹⁵⁰ Scarry further notes the lack of a referent for physical pain, thus rendering the sufferer unable to discuss it in terms of an object.¹⁵¹ In Philoctetes’ case, although his *nosos* has been expressed in vivid, brutal, and even medical terms, it seems when Philoctetes is in the throes of one of his episodes of pain, he becomes his *nosos*. He leaks out incoherent verbal cries as his wound ekes out pus, and both are repulsive. In addition, Odysseus’ use of the word for exposing babies to describe what he did to Philoctetes when he left him on Lemnos becomes significant in the clear similarities between Philoctetes and a wailing infant: both are unable to control bodily leakage, and both are left to die, although Philoctetes has a special fate, like Oedipus, himself exposed when he was an infant.

The adjectives Sophocles uses to describe the illness share a common element: they all have negative connotations that run counter to what is civilized, customary, lawful, and Athenian. Consequently, the *nosos* of Philoctetes as expressed in tragic language resembles not only his physical state, as Worman argues, but also suggests socio-political and religious dimensions. The savageness of his wound and his utterances lead to more savage and unlawful behavior from his comrades, resulting in his abandonment on the island of Lemnos. Sophocles approaches the problem of Philoctetes’ social rejection head-on, without excusing Odysseus’ involvement or wrongdoing, and

¹⁴⁹ Worman 2000: 2.

¹⁵⁰ Scarry 1985: 4.

¹⁵¹ Scarry 1985: 5-6.

without neglecting the religious elements required for Philoctetes' healing and subsequent reintegration into the Greek ranks.

Politics, Religion, and Social Reintegration

From what the ancient sources report of his history — including those manuscripts of Sophoclean drama that contain *vitae* and the biographical entry on Sophocles in the *Suda*¹⁵² — Sophocles would have been uniquely situated to present dramas involving political and religious themes. While these and other ancient sources have been called into question as legitimate bases of fact by Mary Lefkowitz, who argues that they are probably little more than inferences made from his actual dramas,¹⁵³ there are, however, some facts we can rely on. Sophocles served as a general, among the ranks of Pericles and Thucydides.¹⁵⁴ It is also reported that as a young man, Sophocles led the chorus in a victory paean following the battle at Salamis.¹⁵⁵ Thus, Sophocles' area of influence in fifth-century Athens was broader than the theater of Dionysus: he had both political and religious experience and influence. Sophocles almost certainly wrote a paean to Asclepius, and had a reputation as the *Dexion* ("Receiver") of Asclepius at Athens.¹⁵⁶ Given these accomplishments, and because of his early reputation as a charming, easy-going, powerful and influential person, Cedric Whitman labeled his plays

¹⁵² Scodel 2010: 26.

¹⁵³ Lefkowitz 1981: 2.

¹⁵⁴ Lefkowitz 1981: 79.

¹⁵⁵ Lefkowitz 1981: 79.

¹⁵⁶ For more on the evidence for both the paean and for Sophocles as *Dexion*, see Connolly 1998. Connolly concludes that there is "good evidence" for the paean from the Sarapion monument, but that Sophocles as *Dexion* of Asclepius could be, as Lefkowitz (1981) proposes, a result of Hellenistic scholars inferring biographical information from Sophocles' poetic output. There is also debate about the meaning of *Dexion*: is the "Receiver" the hero receiving his worshippers, or the priest receiving the hero or cult statue of a deity, or does it more literally refer to some ritual action associated with the right hand? Nevertheless, the reputation of Sophocles as *Dexion* is established early on (by the fourth century BC) and if this is simply a result of Sophocles' poetic material it still stands to reason that a fifth-century audience would have made at least a few of the same associations.

the “primary documents of the Periclean age.”¹⁵⁷ While that may be slightly hyperbolic, it is nevertheless clear that any attempt to separate Sophocles’ plays completely from their fifth-century context is a disingenuous attempt to brand him as an individual capable of producing art without allowing any personal experiences to shape his ideas.

Philoctetes was performed in 409 BC: at the time of production, the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) was raging fiercely. Not only was the constant turmoil of war a drain on Athens, but also there was also political upheaval. Sophocles had been one of the *probouloi* responsible for placing Athenian rule in the hands of the Four Hundred in 411 BC, when the Council of Four Hundred was established to replace the democracy.¹⁵⁸ Further, as we have seen, Sophocles links the *nosos* depicted in *Philoctetes* with both the political and religious spheres: Odysseus declares that the leadership, including Menelaus, Agamemnon and himself, cast Philoctetes out because his cries were disrupting sacrifices (8-11). It is therefore an issue that begins with a religious conflict that Menelaus and Agamemnon deal with by delegating the task of Philoctetes’ removal to Odysseus. Odysseus had a moral dilemma between obeying the leadership, one sect of *philo*i to whom he is responsible, and abandoning another *philos*. This combination of religious, philosophical, and political elements results in Philoctetes’ abandonment. Sophocles further reminds the audience of the complexity behind the story by continually pressing the issue of Philoctetes’ suffering through his use of nosological and eremitic language.

The political, religious, and medical themes explored in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* collide when the drama asks the audience to consider how Philoctetes will be healed and

¹⁵⁷ Whitman 1951: 240.

¹⁵⁸ Lefkowitz 1981: 79.

then reintegrated into the Greek army to fulfill Helenus' prophecy. Reintegration following the trauma of war, injury, and disability is an especially potent theme when taken together with the ceremonies preceding the public performance of Sophocles' tragedies.¹⁵⁹ Wounded veterans were a segment of the population curiously not acknowledged by the patriotic pre-tragedy rituals at the City Dionysia. The orphan sons of men who perished in battle — whose rearing was supported at city expense — were presented to the crowd. Another ceremony involved those young men who had reached young adulthood and received their armor: the new recruits were presented before the crowd and wished well, before taking privileged seats at the front of the theater. These patriotic ceremonies focused on those who had died in battle, and on those who had not yet set foot on their first battlefield. Living and possibly injured veterans, however, did not have a place in these ceremonies.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps what Sophocles attempted to do was to provide a role for them on stage in *Philoctetes*' drama of reintegration.

Living with the physical and mental wounds of war, as many in the crowd undoubtedly did given that Athens was at war for most of the century, was a struggle in its own right. At the time of production of *Philoctetes*, the Peloponnesian War continued to rage fiercely. Besides the constant financial drain and political turmoil of the war, much of the adult population had endured a devastating plague. The audience would no doubt have been intimately familiar with the suffering of *Philoctetes* and the toll that chronic illness can take on a person. The fear aroused by this tragedy, then, is not only

¹⁵⁹ Recent scholarship has highlighted interesting dimensions of classical Greek descriptions and reactions to war in Shay 1995, Shay 2002, and Meineck and Konstan 2014.

¹⁶⁰ For a thorough discussion of these rituals, and the City Dionysia as a civic event promoting Athenian ideology, see Goldhill 1990: 97-129. See also Winkler 1990: 20-62 for how the origins of the tragic chorus point to a ritual that had at its core a political outlet of self-representation for young citizen-soldiers; more recently, Wilson 2009 summarizes the problems scholars have encountered with Goldhill's influential essay and defends Goldhill's conclusions with previously neglected epigraphic evidence.

anticipatory fear of what may be, but familiar fear of what has already happened. Not everyone has experienced murder, or suicide, or the devastating news that one has fulfilled a horrifying prophecy in which he slaughters his own father and copulates with his own mother, but nearly everyone in the audience in 409 BC had indeed experienced, or knew someone closely who had experienced, the isolating and terrifying pain of illness and political or social betrayal. Sophocles' narrative therefore tells a story of reintegration and healing for Philoctetes; and as the city sees itself in his character, it follows the same journey to Asclepius. Moreover, Sophocles' decision to portray Philoctetes' reintegration into society through an Asclepian cure is quite timely, since, as Wickkiser notes, Asclepius' cult had recently arrived in Athens in 420 BC.¹⁶¹ Thus, a further connection between Athens, Asclepius, and *Philoctetes* is the theme of chronic pain, an ailment for which Asclepius in particular was consulted by the ancient Greeks.

Chronic Pain and Mental Suffering

Philoctetes' reintegration follows a nearly ten-year period of isolation and chronic pain on the deserted island of Lemnos. The problems he faces are more than physical, and for the Greeks, it would have been clear that his pain and illness affected more than his body. In the play, we encounter Philoctetes in obvious physical distress, but it is also important to remember, as Ruth Padel has established, that for the ancient Greeks physical distress is inextricably linked to mental anguish.¹⁶² Although ancient Greek

¹⁶¹ Wickkiser 2008: 82.

¹⁶² Padel 1992: 12-48. See also Simon 1978: 217-219 for a reproduction and analysis of a Hippocratic passage (*On Internal Diseases*) describing a patient with a recurring affliction causing delirium, according to the author, due to a "thickening of bile." This example shows the physical and mental aspects of the affliction and the way the author advises doctors treat it, describing the mental symptoms in as much detail and with as much concern as the physical.

concepts of mind and emotions are often taken metaphorically by modern readers, there is simply no evidence that these concepts were metaphorical for the Greeks, as Padel makes clear from her work with Greek tragedy and the language of the body: “Emotional and intellectual events are not merely describable in the same terms as physical movement: they *are* physical movement.”¹⁶³ Thus, it is likely that the Greeks would not have distinguished between bodily pain and mental anguish, and so we understand that Sophocles does not intend Philoctetes to be merely a physical sufferer. Philoctetes is suffering a leaking and aching wound, but he also suffers from the psychological toll this chronic pain is taking and the emotional isolation into which he has been forced. His reintegration requires a move from pain to healing, and a transformation from isolated and doomed to enjoying a renewed stature in the Greek army and prospects for returning home.

While the Greek conception of mental and physical pain as forces outside of the body may no longer be prevalent medical theories today, the doctors practicing and writing about Hippocratic medicine are acknowledged to have contributed a great deal to the development of medicine.¹⁶⁴ Chronic pain and mental anguish remain difficult illnesses to treat. Further, the two reinforce one another, as chronic pain often causes alienation and insecurity, exacerbating the mental anguish that a chronic-pain patient suffers.¹⁶⁵ In terms of such chronic illnesses, Wickkiser states that chronic illnesses were

¹⁶³ Padel 1992: 44. See also Allan 2014: 261 n. 10 on the mind’s connection to physical process in Greek medical models.

¹⁶⁴ There are some modern medical practitioners who advocate for more “wholistic” approaches to treating disease, but these practices and theories are not as widespread or scientifically acceptable as they were in Greece during the classical period. For the influence of Hippocratic theories on modern health care, see Kleisiaris, Sfakianakis, and Papathanasiou 2014: 1-6; for an account of a modern attempt at “wholistic” drama therapy at Shands Hospital see Hartigan 2009: 81-92.

¹⁶⁵ In a study focused on patients with fibromyalgia, medical researchers found significant comorbidity of depression with chronic pain (86.8% of patients exhibited depressive symptoms), and researchers

a specialty of the healing god Asclepius: “Healing inscriptions from Epidaurus point again and again to chronic ailments.”¹⁶⁶ Although the plague may have been over in Athens by the time of the performance of *Philoctetes*, the continued war effort and political turmoil are symbolic wounds in the foot of Athens that refuse to heal on their own. Asclepius provides cures for individuals as they dream of a healing or catharsis of their ailment. Sophocles could offer something similar to the city as a whole: a civic dream that stirs up the *nosos* in order to reject it.

To this day, the treatment of chronic pain involves approaches that attempt to address the pain itself as well as the mental toll it takes on the patient. In the play, Sophocles portrays how Philoctetes’ literal isolation is compounded by the figurative isolation that chronic pain brings. Modern psychiatric and neuroscience researchers have linked chronic pain and the resulting isolation to both depression and suicidal ideation.¹⁶⁷ Philoctetes expresses suicidal ideation twice in the play: “Death, Death, why can’t you ever come, though I call on you like this every day?” (ὦ Θάνατε, Θάνατε, πῶς ἀεὶ καλούμενος οὕτω κατ’ ἡμᾶρ οὐ δύνα μολεῖν ποτε; 797-798), and “I will cut off my head and all my limbs! My mind is now intent on death, death!” (Κρᾶτα καὶ ἄρθρ’ ἀπὸ πάντα τέμω χερσὶ· φονᾶ, φονᾶ, νόος ἤδη, 1208-1209). Both times, Philoctetes’ death wish is prompted by his recurring episodes of pain, his prolonged isolation, and the betrayal by his leaders and countrymen. Philoctetes embodies these feelings of betrayal, isolation,

concluded that treatment of chronic pain must address both pain control and depression for effective management of symptoms: see Karapetyan and Manvelyan 2017: 55-68. A similar study explores the nature of the relationship between pain and depression to suggest that more effective clinical treatment involves an approach that addresses the psychological aspects of chronic pain: see Okifuji and Turk 2016: 181-201.

¹⁶⁶ Wickkiser 2008: 58; Renberg 2016: 213-214.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Gilbert *et al.* 2009.

and hopelessness, with which contemporary Athenian citizens, having experienced so much political turmoil and disaster, would likely have identified.

Loneliness: Eremetic Language in *Philoctetes*

Not only is Philoctetes suffering from intense pain and suicidal thoughts, but also Sophocles establishes the isolated setting of the play and uses vivid language to emphasize Philoctetes' loneliness. Philoctetes' alienation further reinforces his negative beliefs and hopelessness. He is never shown to imagine healing, restoration, or a future without pain: he is only concerned with survival. Furthermore, even when presented with an opportunity for possible healing, Philoctetes does not believe it and imagines only further pain could come from returning to Troy. To underscore this isolation, Sophocles employs eremitic language throughout the drama: there are fifteen total instances in *Philoctetes* where the title character is described or describes himself as *erēmos* "desolate, isolated" or *monos* "alone." This constant use of the language of isolation sets the audience up for the cathartic end of the play, when Philoctetes is restored from loneliness and pain by the power of Asclepius, and Heracles *ex machina* promises Philoctetes he will return home a hero, "from these sufferings to set up for himself a glorious life," ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον (1422).

Some of the play's descriptions reveal the loneliness of Philoctetes as perceived by others. In the opening song of the parodos, the chorus of Greek sailors lament the misery of the wretched man in song, how he is constantly alone and suffering, and how he is unable to properly plan for his needs, foreshadowing some of Philoctetes' own descriptions of his condition before he appears on stage (169-175):

Οἰκτίρω νιν ἔγωγ', ὅπως,
μή του κηδομένου βροτῶν,

μηδὲ ξύντροφον ὄμμ' ἔχων,
δύστανος, **μόνος αἰεῖ**,
νοσεῖ μὲν νόσον ἀγρίαν,
ἀλύει δ' ἐπὶ παντί τῳ
χρείας ἰσταμένῳ.

I pity him, how,
with no mortal caring for him
and having no companion to look at,
wretched, **always alone**,
he suffers a savage illness,
and he is at a loss at every arising need.

The source of knowledge for the chorus of sailors here is questionable: presumably, they have only heard of Philoctetes' plight from others. Their concern is markedly more focused on his mental and social needs than his physical ones: he suffers a savage illness, but they refer three times to the fact that he is alone: no mortal is there, no companion, and he is utterly isolated. Charles Segal argues that these explicit references to the emotions of pity and fear by the chorus, or by other characters in the drama, are part of the "aesthetic self-awareness" of the dramatist, and that in the moment of the dramatic performance the audience reaction is directed toward a cathartic community experience.¹⁶⁸ In his discussion of *Ajax*, Segal analyzes how the relationship between the audience and the "tragic hero" becomes a means for community bonding: "The audience's identification with the lonely hero thus moves from the agony of hopeless, isolating pollution to identification with the forces of solidarity and reintegration available to the community."¹⁶⁹ Just as Segal describes in the *Ajax*, I suggest Sophocles uses eremitic language, the words of the chorus and the hero himself, to draw the community together in *Philoctetes*.

¹⁶⁸ Segal 1996: 162.

¹⁶⁹ Segal 1996: 161.

Philoctetes describes himself as alone and desolate several times. Later in the play, once Neoptolemus has been revealed as the Greek son of Achilles, an old ally, Philoctetes earnestly desires to depart with him. At this point, Neoptolemus has deceitfully explained that, due to his anger at the Atreidae for giving the arms of Achilles to Odysseus, he left Troy and is on his way home (453-465). Philoctetes himself describes his condition as both *erēmos* and *monos* as he begs Neoptolemus not to leave him alone (468-472):

Πρός νύν σε πατρός, πρὸς τε μητρός, ὃ τέκνον,
πρὸς τ' εἴ τί σοι κατ' οἶκόν ἐστι προσφιλές,
ικέτης ἰκνοῦμαι, μὴ λίπης μ' οὔτω **μόνον**,
ἔρημον ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖσδ' οἷοις ὀρᾶς
ὅσοισί τ' ἐξήκουσας ἐνναίοντά με·

Now, by your father, by your mother, child
and by anything at your home dear to you,
I come as a suppliant, do not leave me **alone** like this,
desolate among these evils such as you can see,
and so many as you have heard I dwell among...

Here Philoctetes desperately begs Neoptolemus to allow him to accompany him to Scyros, and he subsequently persists in appealing to Neoptolemus. A few lines into this speech, Philoctetes also expresses fear of loneliness in the future and a desire not to be left alone, showing the intensity of his desolate feeling as well as the urgency of his fear: “But don’t cast me away, **desolate** like this apart from the footstep of men” (Ἀλλὰ μὴ μ' ἀφῆς | **ἔρημον** οὔτω χωρὶς ἀνθρώπων στίβου, 486-487). Later, in another encounter with Neoptolemus, Philoctetes again begs not to be left alone: “But I beg you, don’t abandon me, **alone**” (ἀλλ' ἀντιάζω, μὴ με καταλίπης **μόνον**, 809). Philoctetes even addresses the chorus, “So will I be left thus **desolate** by you too, strangers, and you will have no pity for me?” (Ἦ καὶ πρὸς ὑμῶν ὄδ' **ἔρημος**, ὃ ξένοι, λειφθήσομαι δὴ κοῦκ ἐποικιτριεῖτέ με;

1070-1071). Philoctetes' urgent pleas highlight that he is not simply alone (*monos*), but through use of the harsh word *erēmos*, he expresses that he feels isolated in an unnatural way.

With this language, Sophocles shows it is not right that Philoctetes was abandoned on a deserted island, especially with no one to care for him, since human contact is another essential element to healing. Prior scholars have commented upon this language of isolation. Penelope Biggs observes in her article on *nosos* in Sophocles: "Constant repetitions of *monos*, *erēmos*, emphasize *loneliness*," and further, that "companionship is consistently associated with the cure of the sufferer."¹⁷⁰ Felix Budelmann also notes with respect to the language of pain and its relationship to loneliness: "Sophocles' pain lends itself to interpretation in terms of the characters' loneliness, their relationship with the divine, their masculinity, or the effect of their suffering on others."¹⁷¹ Philoctetes appeals to this human element in his entreaties to both Neoptolemus and to the chorus, but to the chorus he also appeals to their pity. It is clear, therefore, that human contact is critical to Philoctetes' ultimate healing.

After Odysseus and Neoptolemus leave Philoctetes, with Neoptolemus' betrayal now revealed, Philoctetes laments (1101-1105):

ὦ τλάμων τλάμων ἄρ' ἐγὼ
καὶ μόχθῳ λωβατός, ὃς ἤ-
δη μετ' οὐδενὸς ὕστερον
ἀνδρῶν εἰσοπίσω τάλας
ναίων ἐνθάδ' ὀλοῦμαι...

Wretched, wretched am I,
and disgraced by hardship, I who
henceforth dwelling here **with no one else**
of men, will die here.

¹⁷⁰ Biggs 1966: 223.

¹⁷¹ Budelmann 2007: 444.

Philoctetes despairs, verbally performing the constant, chronic nature of his own suffering through the repetition of the word for “wretched” (τλάμων, τλάμων...τάλας, 1101, 1104). This term is related to the verb τλάω, marked in Homer as how one endures pain through time.¹⁷² Philoctetes’ words here combine this endurance through time with his feelings of pain and loneliness — he dwells “with no one else” (μετ’ οὐδενὸς ἀνδρῶν, 1103-1104) — with the shame that the condition brings (“dishonored, disgraced,” λωβατός, 1102). Sophocles’ emphasis on the isolation of the sufferer is an accurate representation of a patient in chronic pain, as medical researchers have found. Studies of pain and its psychological effects show that chronic pain can inflict severe psychological damage. As scientific researchers into chronic pain recently stated: “Chronic pain ruins marriages and families. It leads to job loss and other financial problems, social isolation, worry, anxiety, depression, and, at times, suicide.”¹⁷³ The problem with chronic pain is that it seems to serve no purpose. It does not warn of disease or infection. It is not easily resolved with treatment, and since there is not always satisfactory treatment or healing, the patient is left without a narrative or a purpose to their suffering, which leads to the above-listed problems.

Rejection of Neoptolemus’ Promise of Healing

For Philoctetes, despite his constant self-care, changing bandages and fetching herbs, his suffering seems without purpose. His life is based on survival, so it is difficult for him to visualize the possibilities of healing and being part of Greek society again.

¹⁷² See Garcia Jr. 2013: 29-30 for a phenomenological analysis on the use for τλάω in Homer as term for the endurance of pain through time.

¹⁷³ Katz, Rosenbloom, and Fashler 2015: 161. See also Okifuji and Turk 2016; and Karapetyan and Manvelyan 2017.

Lorenzo F. Garcia Jr. provides a thorough examination of the experience for someone in pain of the distortion of time, wherein the continuum of lived experience in pain is marked by the irregular rhythm of the waves of pain, rather than a straightforward, sequential experience of objective time.¹⁷⁴ In the play, Philoctetes is stuck in a loop of suffering, and so he is unable to foresee a life without this constant suffering. Indeed, Sophocles shows that Philoctetes prefers his accustomed routine of pain relief that has grown comfortable.¹⁷⁵ The fact that Philoctetes was left isolated on an uninhabited island with a festering wound, forced to eke out an existence with only the help of his bow and an herb he has found for relief is pathetic and pitiable enough. But the betrayals by Odysseus and the rest of the Achaean leadership are even more bitter for Philoctetes when we realize that there is no mention of his healing until much later, after the deception of Neoptolemus has been revealed, and Philoctetes has seen his enemy Odysseus face-to-face.

For most of the duration of the play, no character has promised healing to Philoctetes. Neoptolemus has provided false hope that he will take Philoctetes home, and Odysseus has threatened first to take Philoctetes to Troy by force (981-985), and then that he will take the bow and leave Philoctetes to die on Lemnos, with no means of obtaining food (1054-1062). When Neoptolemus comes back, however, having had a change of heart, he first returns the bow to Philoctetes (1291-92). Next, Neoptolemus attempts to convince him to go with them to Troy, and it is only here that he offers future healing by the sons of Asclepius as incentive for Philoctetes to depart with him (1326-1335):

Σὺ γὰρ νοσεῖς τόδ' ἄλγος ἐκ θείας τύχης,
Χρύσης πελασθεὶς φύλακος, ὃς τὸν ἀκαλυφῆ

¹⁷⁴ Garcia Jr. 2013: 26-30.

¹⁷⁵ See lines 649-650 for Philoctetes' description of his methods of pain relief.

σηκὸν φυλάσσει κρύφιος οἰκουρῶν ὄφις.
Καὶ παῦλαν ἴσθι τῆσδε μή ποτ' ἂν τυχεῖν
νόσου βαρείας, ἕως ἂν αὐτὸς ἥλιος
ταύτη μὲν αἶρη, τῆδε δ' αὖ δύνη πάλιν,
πρὶν ἂν τὰ Τροίας πεδί' ἐκὼν αὐτὸς μόλης,
καὶ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἐντυχῶν Ἀσκληπιδῶν
νόσου μαλαχθῆς τῆσδε, καὶ τὰ πέργαμα
ξὺν τοῖσδε τόξοις ξὺν τ' ἐμοὶ πέρσας φανῆς.

For you are ill with this suffering because of divine
providence,
since you went near the guardian of Chryse, who protects
the uncovered precinct, the hidden snake.
And know that you will never find respite
from this burdensome illness, as long as the sun rises in
one place, and sinks again in another,
until you yourself go willingly to the land of Troy,
and coming upon the sons of Asclepius who are with us,
you will be relieved of this illness,
and with this here bow, and with me, you will be shown
laying waste to the towers.

For the first time in the play, though the audience was likely familiar with the myth, Sophocles offers the information that Philoctetes will be healed (νόσου μαλαχθῆς, 1334) upon coming to Troy, and that this healing will be accomplished by the sons of Asclepius. While the prophecy of Helenus was revealed much earlier (in lines 603-621), there the text merely described what must happen for Troy to be taken: the fate of Philoctetes himself is not revealed by the poet until this late point. Neoptolemus is the first to mention that the healing will take place and be performed by the sons of Asclepius. Yet, despite this revelation of the possibility of Asclepian healing, Philoctetes still remains unwilling to go to Troy. He responds by asking himself about his next steps: “Alas! What should I do? How will I not believe this man’s words, who was giving me well-meaning advice?” (οἴμοι, τί δράσω; πῶς ἀπιστήσω λόγοις | τοῖς τοῦδ', ὃς εὖνους ὦν ἐμοὶ παρήνεσεν; 1350-1351). Philoctetes also articulates his fears about reintegration: he

worries that being around the sons of Atreus (τοῖσιν Ἀτρέως | ἐμὲ ξυνόντα παισίν, 1355-1356) and Odysseus (παιδὶ τῷ Λαερτίου, 1357) will cause more future sufferings (1359-1360). Sophocles thus shows the entrenched anxieties held by the long-isolated Philoctetes with respect to reintegration and his inability to foresee a positive future for himself.

Psychoanalyst Richard Gottlieb claims that Sophocles presents Philoctetes as a hero whose refusal to be healed is suggestive of an attachment to pain and suffering, and his bitterness manifests as “self-injurious spite.”¹⁷⁶ This is supported in the following scene, in which it is clear that Philoctetes remains unmoved by Neoptolemus’ revelation. When Neoptolemus promises help and healing in Troy, Philoctetes cannot envision how he might be relieved of suffering, but can only conceive of more suffering to come in Troy at the hands of the Atreidae (1373-1379):

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| <u>Neoptolemus:</u> | Λέγεις μὲν εἰκότ', ἀλλ' ὅμως σε βούλομαι
θεοῖς τε πιστεύσαντα τοῖς τ' ἐμοῖς λόγοις
φίλου μετ' ἀνδρὸς τοῦδε τῆσδ' ἐκπλεῖν
χθονός. |
| <u>Philoctetes:</u> | Ἦ πρὸς τὰ Τροίας πεδία καὶ τὸν Ἀτρέως
ἔχθιστον υἱὸν τῷδε δυστήνῳ ποδί; |
| <u>Neoptolemus:</u> | Πρὸς τοὺς μὲν οὖν σε τήνδε τ' ἔμπυον βάσιν
παύσοντας ἄλγους κάποσώσοντας νόσου. |
| <u>Neoptolemus:</u> | What you say is likely, but nevertheless, I
want you, trusting both in the gods and in
my words, to sail from this land with me,
your friend. |
| <u>Philoctetes:</u> | What, to the land of Troy, and the most
hated son of Atreus, with this here wretched
foot? |
| <u>Neoptolemus:</u> | To those who will end the pain of your
abscessed limb and save you from illness. |

¹⁷⁶ See the discussion at Gottlieb 2004: 669-689, quote at 670.

Philoctetes envisages that he will endure more humiliation at the hands of his enemies, and still be in pain from his foot (τῷδε δυστήνω ποδί, 1378), even as Neoptolemus tries to offer hope and promise of healing. A few lines later, Philoctetes accuses Neoptolemus of having no shame (οὐ καταισχύνη, 1382) and being a supporter of the sons of Atreus (Ἀτρεΐδαις ὄφελος, 1384). Philoctetes clings to the absolute concept of friends/enemies, arguing that since Neoptolemus is promoting the interests of Philoctetes' enemies, he cannot be a friend.¹⁷⁷ So Neoptolemus suggests a reversal, that those who were his enemies and cast him out will soon save him (σώσουσ', 1391). Still Philoctetes resists, saying: "Never will I look at Troy of my own will!" (οὐδέποθ' ἔκοντα γ' ὥστε τὴν Τροίαν ἰδεῖν, 1392). Philoctetes cannot seem to accept any possibility that healing will happen for him, despite Neoptolemus' earlier dramatic reveal that there would be an Asclepian cure (1329-1335).

Instead, after Neoptolemus seems to give up on any hope of persuading Philoctetes (1393-1396), Philoctetes responds by clinging to suffering but requesting a change of venue: not to depart for Troy, but for Philoctetes' home (1397-1401):

Philoctetes: Ἦε με πάσχειν ταῦθ' ἄπερ παθεῖν με δεῖ·
 ἄ δ' ἦνεσάς μοι δεξιᾶς ἐμῆς θιγῶν,
 πέμπειν πρὸς οἴκους, ταῦτά μοι πρᾶξον, τέκνον,
 καὶ μὴ βράδυνε μηδ' ἐπιμνησθῆς ἔτι
 Τροίας· ἄλις γάρ μοι τεθρύληται λόγος.

Philoctetes: Allow me to suffer the things it is necessary for me to suffer:
 But that which you promised me, while grasping my right hand,
 to send me home, do this for me, child,
 and do not hesitate, and think no more of Troy,
 For that is enough discussion for me.

¹⁷⁷ For more on the ethical issues of friends/enemies in Sophocles and in *Philoctetes*, see Blundell 1989: 184-225.

Philoctetes has become so isolated and hopeless that when an opportunity to be healed is in front of him, he does not take advantage of it. Of course, it could be argued that he is wary of Neoptolemus, who has deceived him once already, and he hates Odysseus with such passion that he cannot envision a scenario where they are not betraying him in some way. Philoctetes has threatened suicide several times, however, and he seems like a man who has scarcely anything to lose: furthermore, what he does have to lose, Heracles' bow, is going to be taken away from him regardless.¹⁷⁸ He would sooner cling to his fierce grudge against the Argive leadership than be healed from his brutal, unforgiving wound — traits which mirror his personality. Just as it seems that Philoctetes has convinced Neoptolemus to take him home and not to Troy — Neoptolemus' response to this entreaty is “If you think so, let us go,” εἰ δοκεῖ, στείχωμεν (1402) — Heracles intervenes *ex machina*. It is only after Heracles' appearance that Philoctetes learns his sufferings will culminate in a glorious life (ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ'εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον, 1422). Although Philoctetes repeatedly asks not to be abandoned and left alone, he nevertheless chooses suffering and isolation before Heracles arrives: it takes the appearance of the god to convince Philoctetes to board the ship for Troy.

The *Nosos* of Athens

The staging of this final scene places emphasis not only on the topography of the deserted setting of Lemnos, but the dialogue's *deixis* calls attention to the actual layout of the city of Athens. After Neoptolemus has given back the bow and seems to agree to take Philoctetes home, they walk down the *parodos* toward the western exit, in the direction of

¹⁷⁸ For discussion on the long history of scholarship concerning whether the bow alone is necessary, or whether Philoctetes' presence is also needed, see Hoppin 1981, which contains an excellent overview of the divergent views on the matter and which scholars have argued for them.

the harbor (1402-1407). Taplin argues that *Philoctetes* only uses one exit, since the *parodos* towards the East was blocked by the Odeon to Pericles that was built in 453 BC; this point is developed in the work of both Wiles and Mitchell-Boyask in their analyses of the staging of the scene.¹⁷⁹ Thus, in their walk toward the west, towards the harbor — perhaps symbolic of civilization as well as the journey to Troy — the actors playing Neoptolemus and Philoctetes would walk directly under the shrine of Asclepius.¹⁸⁰ This temple structure would appear even more noticeable and imposing due to the sloping nature of the theater as the audience watches the pair depart. In addition to the visual marker, the audience would be prepared to make the verbal connection to Asclepius, since Asclepius was mentioned by name in line 1333, at the moment when Neoptolemus promised that the god's sons would heal Philoctetes in Troy.

Sophocles has made clear, however, that at this point in the play, Philoctetes is in charge of his fate, but has made the wrong choice by refusing to go to Troy. Sophocles does this through the chorus, who mention that Philoctetes had an opportunity to choose, and he approved the worse fate over the better one (1099-1100). Thus, when Neoptolemus and Philoctetes make their exit, figuratively and literally passing by the symbol of healing as they walk underneath the temple of Asclepius, the audience would feel regret, but possibly also a sense of recognition. That is, the issues of internal and external conflict facing the city and making it “ill” are likewise self-caused at this point, and the opportunity for healing is available only if the city chooses its course wisely. That is, Athens' internal conflicts that led to oligarchy can be corrected within Athens, just as Athens possesses the healing capabilities that are available at the nearby temple of

¹⁷⁹ Taplin 1987: 72; Wiles 1997: 153; Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 163-66.

¹⁸⁰ For a helpful diagram, see Wiles 2000: 101.

Asclepius. While it is impossible to know Sophocles' true thoughts on the matter, the text of the play does provide the material to interpret the way Sophocles is constantly calling attention to the *nosos* of Athens, whether it is self-inflicted or inflicted by others; and by connecting the two rituals that lead to healing, the cathartic experience in the theater of Dionysus and the incubation ritual in the temple of Asclepius, Sophocles suggests that the means for healing and/or self-correction is also present for the city.

During these years of war and intra-Hellenic conflict, Athens was seen as an intractable tyrant city, and after the plague, the city was wounded both literally from the widespread casualties of the illness but also from the loss of position as an authoritative polis commanding the powerful Delian League. Like Sophocles' tragic hero Philoctetes, Athens is suffering but remains unyielding. During the plague, nearly everyone would have either felt or witnessed the feelings of loneliness and desperation that result from pain and illness. This is true perhaps in particular for those ancient spectators who watched the performance of this play in 409 BC, and who had witnessed many loved ones suffer and perish in the plague. When there is no purpose or narrative underlying the suffering of an individual, or a community, the healing process is stalled. In *Philoctetes*, Sophocles' tragic hero shows the city of Athens a mirror image of itself and warns the city that a choice about healing must be made. In the drama on stage, Athens is able to witness the possibility of its own healing from war, civic unrest, and poor decision-making, like a dream from the god Asclepius.

Even if Sophocles warns Athens to make the right choice, the play also shows that Philoctetes emphatically does not choose healing. Before Philoctetes and Neoptolemus make it off stage to head for Malis, Philoctetes' homeland, however, Heracles

spectacularly appears *ex machina*, promising glory from suffering and confirming Neoptolemus' last-minute promise of an Asclepian cure: "I will send Asclepius to Ilium to stop your illness" (ἐγὼ δ' Ἀσκληπιὸν παυστήρα πέμπω σῆς νόσου πρὸς Ἴλιον, 1437-1438). Heracles' declaration would come to the audience from the top of the *skene*, a dramatic appearance *ex machina* that Sophocles employs to emphasize the divine origin of Philoctetes' cure from Asclepius, just as Philoctetes himself is walking out under the temple. The audience has been primed for this moment, anticipating the catharsis of healing by constantly being reminded of the pain, suffering, and isolation the *nosos* is causing Philoctetes. Through language and staging, Sophocles has subtly but definitively reinforced the connection between the cathartic ritual taking place in the theater and the healing that takes place in the temple. Sophocles uses nosological and eremitic language to emphasize the devastation forced on Philoctetes by his plight as well as to direct the emotions of the audience toward catharsis. So Philoctetes finally departs for Troy, but divine intervention is required to lift him from his condition of loneliness and illness and to see him away from deserted Lemnos.

Lemnos and the Deserted Island Setting

Sophocles employs the setting of Lemnos for two reasons: first, to further his goals of a cathartic dramatic experience by depicting it as uninhabited, thereby dramatically highlighting the isolation of Philoctetes; and second, by evoking connections between the many legends and rituals associated with the island. These connections encourage the audience to experience the ritual and to make correlations between the healing that takes place on Lemnos and the healing that takes place for

Athens at the temple of Asclepius, while maintaining the distance allowed for by the far-flung setting. In addition, Lemnos is a significant locale for the ritual of new fire in honor of Hephaestus, and this significance permits the audience to make connections between the two limping mythic figures, Philoctetes and Hephaestus.¹⁸¹ Lemnos has additional resonance for the episode of the “Lemnian crime,” when the women of Lemnos slaughtered their husbands for their infidelity, and may have been afflicted with a foul smell for their neglect of Aphrodite.¹⁸² Walter Burkert suggests this story may form a basis for the ritual of new fire in honor of Hephaestus, during which the arrival of a ship brings “new” fire to purify the island from the pollution of the Lemnian crime.¹⁸³ The system of links between the myth, the ritual, and *Philoctetes*, while not explicit, equips the audience to make connections between the suffering of Philoctetes and their own suffering. Sophocles could have made these connections explicit by placing the myth in a choral ode or in a discursive comment by one of the characters. The fact that he leaves these connections implicit supports a theory of drama as a healing dream. Mark Griffith suggests the possibility of theater as a “potential space” similar to a dream, that projects the dreamer’s conflicting desires and habits.¹⁸⁴ I posit that this interpretation can be applied in *Philoctetes*, and further, that this is a self-conscious acknowledgement of the healing capabilities of fiction, since the healing capabilities of dreams were already recognized in the cult of Asclepius. This self-consciousness is evidenced by the way Sophocles connects the events of the performance to ritual through subtle but effective

¹⁸¹ Burkert 1970: 1-16.

¹⁸² This version of the myth is found in Philostratus’ *Heroikos* 53.5-7 in Maclean and Aitken 2001.

¹⁸³ Burkert 1970: 6.

¹⁸⁴ Griffith 2005: 99.

staging, while he uses nosological and eremitic language to provide the audience with a cathartic experience.

Philoctetes, as we have seen, is isolated by his experience of chronic pain, and he is literally alone on a deserted island, despite the fact that Lemnos was decidedly inhabited throughout recent historical memory at the time of production. Some scholars consider that the isolated setting of the play was a way for Sophocles to challenge or perhaps provide a fictional playground for sophistic ideas about the “natural” condition of man in a pre-civilized state. As Peter Rose claims: “Sophocles, in presenting Philoctetes’ battle for survival in utter isolation from other human beings, is primarily offering an image of the human condition which derives ultimately from the sophists’ speculations about the conditions of life in the primitive, presocial stage.”¹⁸⁵ In a different vein, Mitchell-Boyask has interpreted that the setting of the play in deserted Lemnos was a way for Sophocles to focus the action onto an Athenian setting, in order to emphasize that the only *polis* here is Athens. That is, by removing the scene from any sort of *polis* or community, Sophocles is able to “refocus his audience on the one *polis* in view: Athens itself.”¹⁸⁶ Both scholars, however, maintain the importance of an Athenian viewpoint in their interpretations of the Lemnian setting of the play. Jean-Pierre Vernant claims “Sophocles makes virtually no use of the extremely rich mythology linked with the island of Lemnos,” yet qualifies this statement by suggesting that further work on the matter would be a fruitful endeavor.¹⁸⁷ In Froma Zeitlin’s influential piece on Thebes, she argues that the city is a *topos* for tragedians as an anti-Athens, a place that explores the

¹⁸⁵ Rose 1976: 58.

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 156.

¹⁸⁷ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 164 n. 15.

most radical implications of the tragic without risking Athens' image.¹⁸⁸ I propose something similar for Lemnos here: that Lemnos functions as a place to explore the boundaries of acceptable experience of isolation, illness, the inadequacy and even immorality of leadership, and the human need for divine healing.

Moreover, while not entirely departing from Mitchell-Boyask's interpretation, I suggest that, more importantly, this deserted island setting emphasizes the complete isolation of the sufferer — which, as noted above, Philoctetes himself constantly refers to — and the metaphorical isolation *nosos* brings to an individual, and by extension, to the adjacent community or *polis*. Here I agree with Rose that the deserted setting highlights the *pathos* felt for the sufferer, and metaphorically points to the isolation Philoctetes experiences as a chronic pain sufferer discussed above. My interpretation, however, does not focus on Sophocles as interacting with sophistic speculations about the origins of pre-social humanity, though I will not go so far as to deny the possibility. My argument focuses rather on the significance of Lemnos itself. If Rose's supposition were correct, would it not have been simpler to choose an unnamed uninhabited island? Sophocles has already made significant departures from the myth, so it does not seem inconceivable that, if the goal were to focus merely on some state of nature or survival, any unnamed island would do; nevertheless, Sophocles sticks with tradition.

Furthermore, although I think Mitchell-Boyask perhaps takes the connections between Lemnos and Athens too far when he asserts “the play is ‘set’ in Athens,”¹⁸⁹ I do agree that the connections between the two are important for understanding Sophocles' use of setting for his cathartic goals. Lemnos is linked with Athens both politically, as it

¹⁸⁸ Zeitlin 1990b: 144-145.

¹⁸⁹ Mitchell-Boyask 2008: 156.

has been an important colony in the empire and a crucial ally in the Peloponnesian War, and religiously, since both places have significant connections to Hephaestus and Athena.¹⁹⁰ As Oliver Taplin describes the close association between Lemnos and Athens: “There were indeed very few places outside Attica that had closer links than Lemnos” to Athens.¹⁹¹ The close link between the two *poleis* substantiates the claim that Sophocles intends for the audience to recall the ritual associations between Lemnos and Athens; while staging Lemnos as uninhabited places the focus on Philoctetes’ painful, solitary existence and encourages the audience’s emotional identification with him, thereby establishing the conditions for catharsis.

The religious and political links between Lemnos and Athens set up the cathartic release of the play, because the audience identifies both with the hero and the setting, while Lemnos is distant enough to allow for critical self-reflection on the part of the Athenian audience members. Nevertheless, as we will see, the setting of Lemnos is more fraught with meaning than simply being connected to Athens. Sophocles uses Lemnos as the setting because it is a significant place in terms of healing (for Hephaestus) and purification ritual. Because drama is a citywide and publicly sponsored event that celebrated the glory of Athens and its accomplishments, tragic heroes have often been identified by scholars as representative of the entire *polis*. In particular, Bernard Knox noted the similarities between Sophoclean tragic heroes and the city of Athens itself:¹⁹²

Undaunted by losses and defeats, impervious to advice or threat, finding always fresh sources of energy in its passionate conviction of superiority, Athens pursued, throughout the course of Sophocles’ manhood and old age, its stubborn, magnificent course to the final disaster. It was, like a Sophoclean hero, in love with the impossible.

¹⁹⁰ Taplin 1987: 73.

¹⁹¹ Taplin 1987: 72-73.

¹⁹² Knox 1964: 60-61.

Philoctetes, similarly, is convinced of his moral superiority over Odysseus and the sons of Atreus. The exiled, depressed, and rejected hero is forced to depart with the exact figure who betrayed him, and the youthful son of Achilles, paradigm of the heroic age, is caught in the middle. Philoctetes complains of being *aphilos*, *apolis*, and *erēmos* (1016-1018), but refuses to accept that healing and reintegration are possible. In an equivalent way, Athens itself has become isolated from the rest of Greece, nursing its own wounds and concerned only with its own wellbeing. It takes the intervention of a god to show Philoctetes, and ultimately Athens, that healing can take place, since human efforts are powerless to accomplish it. If Philoctetes can be interpreted as representing Athens, then it is crucial to look more deeply at the setting of Lemnos and how it contributes to the catharsis of the play.

Lemnos has a rich mythological and ritual history to which Sophocles alludes and which he uses to build the narrative and themes of his play. However, Taplin suggests that the Lemnos of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* may not be totally uninhabited: "In Sophocles, of course, Lemnos has no Lemnians. I do not believe he is asking the audience to believe that Lemnos as a whole is uninhabited, but that the part where Philoctetes was marooned is entirely inaccessible so that he has never encountered any Lemnians during his time there."¹⁹³ While Taplin's speculation that there may have been Lemnians on another part of the island is difficult to prove in terms of what Sophocles had in mind, clearly the eremitic effect of the uninhabited Lemnos as a setting remains the most prominent dramatic device, since the stage production depicts Philoctetes as quite alone.

¹⁹³ Taplin 1987: 72-73.

Indeed, the deserted Lemnos as the setting is one of the most commented-upon innovations with respect to the tragic tradition of Philoctetes and Sophocles' version of the story. Aeschylus and Euripides wrote versions of the play that precede Sophocles' production in 409 BC: Euripides' version debuted twenty-two years prior in 431 BC, and Aeschylus produced his version some time before Euripides' play.¹⁹⁴ In both earlier versions, the chorus is comprised of Lemnians.¹⁹⁵ Euripides also includes a Lemnian character who was a friend of Philoctetes.¹⁹⁶ All three dramatists incorporate Odysseus — Aeschylus and Euripides depict him as unrecognizable,¹⁹⁷ while in Sophocles' version he uses Neoptolemus as a proxy — as the primary Greek hero in charge of fetching Philoctetes and his bow, whereas the Cyclic epics typically depict Diomedes as the Greek hero charged with the task.¹⁹⁸ While there are further complications and distinctions in terms of individual characters and their functions because we have limited knowledge of these dramas, the emphasis in Sophocles' version falls on the deserted island of Lemnos as the dramatic setting.

“Lemnian Fire,” Hephaestus, and Ritual Healing

Lemnos is famous in the mythological tradition for “Lemnian fire,” yet scholarly debate continues as to what exactly constitutes this fire.¹⁹⁹ It is sometimes associated with volcanic activity that may have occurred on the island, and other times associated with fire used to forge metal, since the island is known as a sacred space for worship of

¹⁹⁴ Most information regarding both lost plays comes from first century AD prose author Dio Chrysostom, and is presented in the Loeb editions of Collard and Cropp 2008 and Sommerstein 2009, along with the extant fragments. For the date of Euripides' *Philoctetes* see Collard and Cropp 2008: 373.

¹⁹⁵ Collard and Cropp 2008: 370; Sommerstein 2009: 251.

¹⁹⁶ Collard and Cropp 2008: 377.

¹⁹⁷ Sommerstein 2009: 250-251; Collard and Cropp 2008: 371.

¹⁹⁸ Webster 1970: 3.

¹⁹⁹ For possible meanings of “Lemnian fire,” see Martin 1987: 78-79.

Hephaestus. In Aristophanes' comedy *Lysistrata* the burning fire from the pots carried by the old men of the chorus is compared to Lemnian fire: the fire burns their eyes "like a raving bitch" (ὥσπερ κύων λυττῶσα τὸφθαλμῶ δάκνει, 298).²⁰⁰ Although the play explains no further what this term means precisely, it is associated both here and in the mythological episode referred to as the "Lemnian crime" with topsy-turvy relations between the sexes. It was at Lemnos where the men were slaughtered by their wives, who punished them for their infidelity, an indiscretion that was due to the Lemnian women abandoning their duties to Aphrodite (sex with their husbands).²⁰¹ Thus, in both the comic play *Lysistrata* and the mythological episode of the Lemnian women, there is a separation of the sexes and an improper seizure of power by a group of women.

Just prior to this exclamation by the chorus of old men in the comic play, they mention the need to give "air to the fire" (καὶ τὸ πῦρ φύσητέον, 293), perhaps suggesting that there are no longer flames, but the charcoal is just smoking, and the flame is about to go out; thus there is the possibility that the Lemnian fire here is symbolic of the old men's impotence.²⁰² This could also mean that "Lemnian fire" is meant to evoke an image of smoke without fire, as may be the case in some areas with volcanic activity, or that it represents a fire with hot and smoking coals, useful for forging metal. Or it could simply mean a fire with biting smoke. Most importantly, scholars of ancient religion note that Lemnian fire has associations with ritual cleansing in purification rituals as part of a festival to Hephaestus that recreates the invention of fire.²⁰³ Burkert discusses the

²⁰⁰ See Henderson 1987 for the Greek text.

²⁰¹ Philostratus' *Heroikos* 53.5-7.

²⁰² This may be further supported by *Philoctetes*, since Philoctetes refers to himself, the embattled withering man, as a shadow of smoke (καπνοῦ σκιάν, 946) but to the youthful Neoptolemus as fire (ὃ πῦρ, 927).

²⁰³ Burkert 1970: 3.

possibility that the ritual, which brought new fire to Lemnos to purify the island, preceded the myth: “It is true that we do not usually find Greek myths as a liturgically fixed part of ritual; but this does not preclude the possibility of a ritual origin of myth; and if, in certain cases, there is secondary superimposition of myth on ritual, even the adopted child may have a real father — some distant rite of somehow similar pattern.”²⁰⁴ Burkert subsequently claims that, specifically in the case of the episode of the Lemnian women and the ritual of new fire: “It is by myth that ancient tradition explains the ritual.”²⁰⁵ Whatever the exact origins and meaning of the ritual of new fire, it seems clear that the Lemnian fire is symbolic in the fifth century for something biting, dangerous, and painful, since references exist in Aristophanes and Sophocles, and further, that fire together with Lemnos has ritual associations with Hephaestus. The imagery of fire is used by Sophocles to call attention to the purification and healing Philoctetes looks forward to, and his subsequent reintegration into the Greek forces.

Sophocles makes a further ritual connection to “Lemnian fire” through the words of Philoctetes himself, as he cries out to Neoptolemus in the midst of a painful episode, begging for the young man to kill him, as Philoctetes once killed Heracles with fire (799-801):

ὦ τέκνον, ὦ γενναῖον, ἀλλὰ συλλαβὼν
 τῷ Λημνίῳ τῷδ’ ἀνακαλουμένῳ πυρὶ
 ἔμψησον, ὦ γενναῖε·

Child, noble one, taking hold of me
 burn me with the fire called Lemnian, noble one!

²⁰⁴ Burkert 1970: 2.

²⁰⁵ Burkert 1970: 6.

Philoctetes, in this moment of weakness and suffering, hopes to reenact the death of Heracles, following in the hero's footsteps, with Neoptolemus as his protégé, fulfilling the duties of euthanasia he once fulfilled. But Neoptolemus does not assent to this proposition, and Philoctetes himself admits a few lines later that the sickness "comes sharply and goes away swiftly" (ὡς ἦδε μοι | ὄξειᾶ φοιτᾷ καὶ ταχεῖ' ἀπέρχεται, 807-808). Webster's commentary on line 800 explains the words "Lemnian fire" as "the flames from the summit of the volcano, Mosychlos, caused by Hephaistos."²⁰⁶ In his commentary, Sir Richard Jebb also refers to this volcano, and suggests that since it is no longer visible, it has most likely been submerged.²⁰⁷ Phyllis Forsyth further discusses the possibility of volcanic activity on Lemnos: she argues that advances in modern geology demonstrate that there is a good chance that ancient Lemnos was indeed volcanic.²⁰⁸ Burkert previously discounted this theory: "Geographical survey had revealed that there never was a volcano on Lemnos at any time since this planet has been inhabited by *homo sapiens*."²⁰⁹ At the very least, even a skeptic like Burkert admits that Lemnian fire in Greek religion and literature was "something famous and uncanny."²¹⁰ So the idea of Lemnian fire was well established in the Greek tradition: Lemnos as a location has connections with hot, smoldering fire, possibly volcanic, and has further divine connections to the god Hephaestus and purification rituals dedicated to him.

²⁰⁶ Webster 1970: 169.

²⁰⁷ Jebb 1908: 158 notes: "The volcanic mountain called 'Μόσυχλος' appears to have been on the east coast of Lemnos, south of the rocky promontory ("Ἐρμαῖον ὄρος," v. 1459) to which the cave of Philoctetes was adjacent. No volcanic crater can now be traced in Lemnos; and it is probable that the ancient Mosychlus has been submerged."

²⁰⁸ See Forsyth 1984, who argues that vestiges of pre-human volcanic activity were similar enough to contemporary volcanic islands that it is logical for an ancient Greek to assume a similar geological composition.

²⁰⁹ Burkert 1970: 5, although his sources are quite outdated (1885).

²¹⁰ Burkert 1970: 5.

Lemnos' association with the volcanic god Hephaestus begins with the story that the young god was forcefully cast down onto the island by his father Zeus for supporting his mother Hera in a marital squabble. This episode is recounted by Hephaestus to Hera in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, as Hera is frustrated by Zeus' decision to help Thetis and thereby Achilles (1.589-593):²¹¹

ἀργαλέος γὰρ Ὀλύμπιος ἀντιφέρεσθαι·
ἤδη γάρ με καὶ ἄλλοτ' ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαῶτα
ῥῖψε ποδὸς τετάγων ἀπὸ βηλοῦ θεσπεσίῳ,
πᾶν δ' ἤμαρ φερόμην, ἅμα δ' ἠελίῳ καταδύντι
κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ, ὀλίγος δ' ἔτι θυμὸς ἐνῆεν·
ἔνθά με Σίντιες ἄνδρες ἄφαρ κομίσαντο πεσόντα.

For it is difficult to match oneself against the Olympian.
For at one time when I was also very eager to assist,
and he hurled me, having seized my foot, from the divine
threshold and all day I was carried, and as the sun was
going down
I fell onto Lemnos, and there was little life left in me still.
There the Sintian men cared for me immediately after
falling.

Hephaestus, grabbed by his foot, is thrown down onto the same island where Philoctetes suffers from a snakebite-infested foot: the connections seem hardly coincidental. Furthermore, both individuals are ultimately healed, Hephaestus by the Sintian men on the island of Lemnos, and Philoctetes after a nine-year stay on the island by Asclepius' son Machaon. An additional fall of Hephaestus, the result of Hera's disdain for his lameness, is recorded in *Iliad* Book 18, after which the god requires *nine years* of therapeutic care by the goddess Thetis.²¹² Both individuals are eventually reintegrated: Philoctetes with the Greek army at Troy, and Hephaestus back to his crafted mansion on

²¹¹ For the Greek text of the *Iliad*, see Monro and Allen 1920; the translation is mine.

²¹² Hephaestus' nine-year stint (εἰνάετες) on earth with Thetis and Eurynome is mentioned at *Iliad* 18.4.

Olympus, although according to mythological tradition, the god Hephaestus remains forever *cholos* (“lame”).²¹³

Sophocles offers another instance where Philoctetes calls on the famous flame of Lemnos, and here explicitly connects the fire to Hephaestus. At the tense moment when Odysseus is threatening to seize him and has already gained control of the bow, Philoctetes invokes both the Lemnian land and then the flame of Hephaestus as a protective, or perhaps vengeful force (986-988):

ὦ Λημνία χθὼν καὶ τὸ παγκρατὲς σέλας
Ἥφαιστότευκτον, ταῦτα δῆτ' ἀνασχετά,
εἴ μ' οὗτος ἐκ τῶν σῶν ἀπάξεται βίαι;

Lemnian land, and all-powerful flame
wrought by Hephaestus, can this be endured,
that he would take me from you by force?

In this exclamatory question, Philoctetes summons the island almost as if it were a chthonic deity, and the flame of Hephaestus as if it has the ability to save him. While Philoctetes previously asked Neoptolemus to burn him with the fire (799-801), as he once did for Heracles, here in these lines Philoctetes calls on the flame of Hephaestus to save him from Odysseus' forceful seizure. Sophocles strategically weaves together the themes of Lemnian fire and its ritual connection to Hephaestus with the notion of Philoctetes' ultimate healing by the son of Asclepius in the midst of a highly charged scene in the play.

Scholars have analyzed the myths surrounding the Lemnian religious ritual of new fire, whether they precede or explain the ritual, as tales that show a ritual of catharsis resulting in a reversal from some abnormal existence to a happy one. Burkert connects

²¹³ For more on the representation of Hephaestus in ancient Greek art and literature as “lame” or “crooked-limbed,” see Garcia Jr. 2013: 189-190.

the ritual of new fire, a festival of Hephaestus, to the episode of the Lemnian women.²¹⁴ Burkert argues that the myth offers a “mental container”²¹⁵ to account for patterns of tensions between generations or sexes that at some point require cathartic discharge through ritual.²¹⁶ He further claims that this ritual was associated with reversal (περιπέτεια): “First, there begins a period of abnormal, barren, uncanny life, until, secondly, the advent of the ship brings about a new, joyous life — which is in fact the return to normal life.”²¹⁷ Thus Sophocles stages *Philoctetes* on an uninhabited Lemnos to emphasize the ritual of catharsis, since Philoctetes’ experience on the island can certainly be described as “abnormal, barren, uncanny.” In addition, his opportunity for healing comes with the arrival of a ship and the option to return to his previous life. Thus *Philoctetes*, like the story of the Lemnian women, depicts a reversal from a state of uncivilized, savage existence to a return to civilization and healing, a process which is cathartic not only as it purifies Philoctetes from his infected wound, but also as it provides an emotional outlet for the audience beleaguered by war and plague.

Furthermore, we have direct evidence that Sophocles was interested in the episode of the Lemnian women, since he dramatized it in play called the *Lemniai*.²¹⁸ Aeschylus also dramatized the episode in a tetralogy including *Lemniai*, *Hypsipyle*, and *Argos*.²¹⁹ Euripides likewise has a play titled *Hypsipyle*, and substantial fragments are available thanks to a 1905 Oxyrhynchus find.²²⁰ Regrettably, only four disjointed lines remain of Sophocles’ *Lemniai*: one fragment notably links Lemnos to Chryse: “Lemnos, and

²¹⁴ Burkert 1970: 5-6.

²¹⁵ Burkert 1970: 14.

²¹⁶ Burkert 1970: 15.

²¹⁷ Burkert 1970: 7.

²¹⁸ For these fragments, see Lloyd-Jones 1996: 204-205.

²¹⁹ Sommerstein 2009: 250-251.

²²⁰ Collard and Cropp 2008: 250-321.

neighboring hills of Chryse!” (ὦ Λῆϊμε Χρύσης τ' ἀγχιτέρμονες πάγοι).²²¹ Nevertheless, it is clear from the existence of the play that there is a connection in the fifth-century consciousness — as evidenced by the interest paid to the Lemnian material by Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus — between the story of Lemnos and a ritual involving purification by fire.

Thus, we have seen that Sophocles utilizes Lemnos as a locus to emphasize the eremitic effect of Philoctetes' suffering and to establish connections between Lemnos and Athens while maintaining the distance required both for processing the emotions experienced and for the dream-like effect, and that these connections include links to Hephaestus and the ritual of new fire associated with the episode of the Lemnian women. Further, Lemnos is associated with a certain *dysodia*, a “foul smell.” Not only is this connected with the matter oozing from Philoctetes' wound (δυσοσμία, 876 and κακῆ ὀσμῆ, 890-891), but the *dysodia* also appears in some iterations of the story of the Lemnian women. There are several versions of this myth, but it commonly begins with the women's neglect of Aphrodite. In many versions, this neglect results in Aphrodite afflicting them with a foul smell, which repulses their husbands. One account of the myth attributed to Myrsilus of Methymna credits Medea, another tragic character, rather than Aphrodite with creating the foul odor of the Lemnian women by using some sort of drug (φάρμακον) because of jealousy (διὰ ζηλοτυπίαν).²²² In either case, the foul odor is associated with disruption in the family. In Philoctetes' case, we see that it is associated with political malfeasance (abandoning a cherished *philos*) and disease. Ultimately, the

²²¹ Fr. 384: see Lloyd-Jones 1996: 205.

²²² This account creates some timeline complications with respect to the Lemnian crime: see Jackson 1990 for the scholiast's entry and discussion. Myrsilus' account could be a story of revenge, suggesting that either there were two episodes of *dysodia* for the women of Lemnos, or that the *dysodia* was a vengeful act by Medea and a separate incident from the Lemnian crime.

foul smell will be expelled along with the disease; thus, associations made between Lemnos, Hephaestus, and Philoctetes include not only foul odors and societal troubles but also ritual healing.

The significance of the associations between the ritual of new fire and cathartic healing is heightened when we consider the wealth of nosological language in Sophoclean tragedy beyond *Philoctetes*, particularly in *Ajax* and *Trachiniae*. Sophocles has delved into the issues of illness, insanity, and pain, but in *Philoctetes*, the suffering protagonist is restored. This outcome stands in stark contrast to Ajax's suicide, but has some interesting correspondences with Heracles' trajectory in *Trachiniae*: although Heracles ends up dead, he gains immortality. In addition, Philoctetes' role in Heracles' death, together with Heracles' *apotheosis*, render the ending of *Philoctetes* especially compelling. The two are reunited, and Heracles is now a *bona fide* divinity who has the power to persuade Philoctetes to go to Troy. Further, Asclepius, whose descendant Machaon is the agent of Philoctetes' healing, is another god who was once a mortal. The threads tying together the stories of Philoctetes, Heracles, and Hephaestus are evident in their tragic, painful illnesses, their abuse by immortals and leadership figures, and their ultimate restoration.²²³ Sophocles highlights these connections, and yet makes Philoctetes all the more tragic by depicting Lemnos as uninhabited. There are no Sintians on Lemnos available to heal Philoctetes, as there were for Hephaestus: the sole hope for Philoctetes is an Asclepian cure, which he only accepts with the intervention of Heracles, whom he once helped in a ritual of fire. Within a nexus of meaning joining Heracles and Hephaestus to Philoctetes and Lemnos, Sophocles is constantly pointing the audience to the connections between Philoctetes and ritual healing.

²²³ For more on Hephaestus as a tragic figure in Homer, see Rinon 2008: 127-144.

Moreover, Sophocles focuses on this healing, cathartic function of the island of Lemnos by depicting the island as uninhabited. Undoubtedly, the setting of the story of *Philoctetes* on Lemnos has to do with its rich mythological and ritual background that connects it with purification, and in particular to the healing narratives of the god Hephaestus, to which Sophocles draws attention through mentions of both Hephaestus and the Lemnian fire. The setting of the play on the uninhabited island of Lemnos, together with the use of nosological and eremitic language throughout the dramatic dialogue, invoke the themes of loneliness, suffering, and illness. These provoke the pity of the audience for the undeserving protagonist, causing them to suffer as well, and also to fear in a very visceral sense the possibility of ending up in a similar situation where the city and individual citizens are abandoned by elite leadership and left to suffer, perhaps literally to suffer pain. For the city, however, this play accomplishes a catharsis of those emotions by allowing them to be experienced, albeit in a dream-like way on Lemnos and through a Homeric protagonist, and then expelled. Catharsis is accomplished on stage, since Philoctetes is reintegrated and promised healing in Troy. The promise of Asclepian healing is a nod to the capability of Athens for self-correction, notably referenced in tragedy for other *poleis* who must travel to Athens to solve their internal issues.²²⁴ My analysis demonstrates that these elements, together with the characters and dialogue of the play, are stimuli to cathartic purgation for the entire community.

²²⁴ In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, *Medea*, and *Heracles*, and Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Athens is the destination where sanctuary or protection can be found: see Zeitlin 1990b: 144.

Conclusion: Asclepius and Catharsis

Once Heracles announces that Philoctetes will, in fact, return to Troy, and that he will be healed while there, Sophocles has in place all the elements for the cathartic experience. First, he has aroused the sympathetic emotions of the audience through pervasive use of nosological and eremitic language. This provides for the audience's identification with Philoctetes, since Sophocles taps into some of the most prevalent and potent feelings associated with suffering. Next, Sophocles reinforces the audience's affinity with Philoctetes by staging the conflict on the uninhabited Lemnos, emphasizing the loneliness and pain of the protagonist. This setting further encourages an Athenian audience to recognize the resemblance between Philoctetes' isolated and tumultuous situation and Athenian political concerns, while maintaining dramatic distance both in the fiction of a theatrical production and a remote setting. The setting of Lemnos specifically allows the audience to make connections to the myth and ritual background of the island, specifically the previous episodes of Hephaestus' fall and the purification ritual associated with the Lemnian crime; through these connections the play directs the audience to a cathartic experience established already in other myths and rituals.

The final element completing the cathartic experience of *Philoctetes* comes when Heracles confirms Neoptolemus' earlier prediction of an Asclepian cure. Finally, Sophocles delivers, through the mouth of Heracles, the news that restoration will come for Philoctetes' foot, and the Greeks will have victory at Troy. This element calls specific attention to the temple of Asclepius, as shown above, and reminds the audience of their position in the city: at the theater of Dionysus. *Philoctetes* shows that Sophocles consciously and intentionally draws attention to the cathartic powers of drama as a

parallel experience to the ritual healing in the *abaton* at the temple of Asclepius. In the drama/dream of *Philoctetes*, the audience is reminded of its suffering and illness through the persistent use of nosological and eremitic language, as well as the staging and characters in the drama, and they are eventually provided with an opportunity to purge those negative feelings as a community through catharsis.

CONCLUSION

Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* perform a cathartic ritual on stage, as they both reflect the larger cultural motif of catharsis. The depiction of catharsis on stage, as in a dream,²²⁵ mirrors the incubation ritual in the cult of Asclepius. In *Ajax*, Sophocles presents the hero Ajax maddened by the goddess Athena. My examination finds that Sophocles' use of the language of *nosos* and *mania*, together with the conflicts between Ajax's system of ethics and the larger social context, contributed to a cathartic outcome. In *Philoctetes*, the abandoned and ill title character must ultimately be restored to the community through his negotiation with Odysseus and Neoptolemus. After the failure of several attempts to convince Philoctetes, the play ends with a *deus ex machina*: Heracles appears, and offers Philoctetes healing and reintegration into the Greek army with the promise of a "glorious life" after all his suffering (ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον, 1422). His speech also gestures toward the availability of a healing ritual in both the temple of Asclepius and the theater of Dionysus.²²⁶ The semantic connections between the concept of catharsis and its use in medical, religious, and poetic contexts support my analysis. The physical proximity between the temple of Asclepius and the theater of Dionysus provides further support for understanding the ritual of tragic drama as a parallel ritual to incubation. Thus, my study shows how Sophocles develops a conception of catharsis in these two plays by depicting the ritual on stage.

Within the tradition of scholarship on Greek tragedy, the concept of catharsis occupies an important but complex position. This thesis interprets the concept within tragic drama and offers readings of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* that hope to add not only to the

²²⁵ For more on the analogy of a dream in literary criticism of tragedy or drama, see Winnicott 1971: 1-114 and Griffith 2005: 98-110.

²²⁶ See my discussion in Chapter 2: 78-79.

understanding of these two plays, but more importantly to the interpretation of fifth-century tragedy as a cathartic ritual that shares important characteristics with another Asclepian healing ritual. In doing so, we can understand that Sophocles has contributed to this concept of catharsis, even as it is ubiquitous in other areas of Greek thought. The practice of releasing humors in medicine and the practice of cleansing in religion both have semantic connections to catharsis. Catharsis exists in rituals that expel guilt or pollution by blood sacrifice or some other offering, and in medicine as purgation through excretion of bodily fluids.²²⁷ In both ritual and medical terms, the idea is one of release. In drama, we have seen that this family of semantic meanings for one term is present in the Sophoclean explorations of illness, madness, and conflict in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Thus, in these plays, Sophocles both challenges ethical systems and ideas while adding to the cultural understanding of what roles illness and healing may play in society and how they can be counteracted.

The interpretation of tragedy as “cathartic” has long been defined in terms of Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1449b 26-27), whether or not the scholar in question is defining himself against an Aristotelian interpretation²²⁸ or clarifying one point of it.²²⁹ This thesis aims not to disrupt that tradition, but rather to add to it by reimagining the catharsis Aristotle mentions as a process that lies beneath the composition of tragic drama and eventually rises to the surface through different situations in different plays. Tragedy has been deemed a venue to pose and explore the ambiguous and perhaps unanswerable questions of life,²³⁰ questions that interrogate ethics, social conventions, and family

²²⁷ Parker 1983: 213, 220.

²²⁸ See Kitto 231-245.

²²⁹ As Knox 1964 does with the Aristotelian figure of the “tragic hero.”

²³⁰ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 18-19.

dynamics.²³¹ Dionysus, the god of blurred boundaries,²³² is, after all, celebrated by the same festival that hosts tragedy, and so the stage itself is a fitting location for explorations of paradox. The emphasis in scholarship about Greek tragedy on the contradictions and tensions within tragedy have often led to *aporia*. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet's work studies the interactions between myth and tragedy, and focuses on the duality in the chorus, hero, and poetry of drama.²³³ This tradition of deconstruction, while certainly not an illegitimate approach, can be fruitfully challenged by interpretations that offer positive determination of what tragedy offers, rather than only what it questions. This thesis sees tragedy as also offering some solution to these problematic issues through catharsis and outlines how Sophocles demonstrates solutions in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.

In the first chapter, I show that Sophocles calls attention to catharsis through the use of primary nosological language of *mania* and *nosos* as applied to Ajax. Further, Sophocles utilizes the secondary language of suffering applied both to Ajax and to those who are affected by his illness (*lupē*, *algos*, *odunē*, and *ania*). This analysis depends on the assumption that Sophocles is using metatheatrics to investigate the role of tragedy in healing by depicting a cathartic ritual on stage: in particular, it is through the depiction of Athena as quasi-director that Sophocles engages with metatheatrical techniques.²³⁴ In this chapter, I also discuss how Sophocles explores the ethical system of helping friends/harming enemies through the characters of Odysseus and Ajax, and propose that part of the cathartic ritual within the *Ajax* involves not only burying Ajax's body, but also

²³¹ Seaford 1995: 202.

²³² See Vernant in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 389-390 for his discussion of Dionysus' ambiguous role in the Greek pantheon and his "subversion of order" (390) through madness and illusion.

²³³ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988: 23-28.

²³⁴ See Falkner 1999: 173-180.

excising the archaic social system that results in situations where a member of the community feels justified in violently attacking his peers. I read this burial as a cathartic ritual performed on stage as part of Sophocles' development of how drama can offer catharsis, just as the *technai* of medicine and religion present a similar process of catharsis. This chapter shows how Sophocles excites the emotions of the audience through the language of *nosos*, *mania*, and suffering and then performs catharsis through negotiations between Odysseus, Teucer, Agamemnon, and Menelaus; this is followed by the resolution and burial of Ajax's corpse.

In my second chapter, I turn to the *Philoctetes* to examine how Sophocles develops a concept of catharsis within this drama. In *Philoctetes* the cathartic process takes place on stage, as the discarded, wounded hero is reintegrated and healed by a son of Asclepius at the end of the play. I also argue that the play's deictic reference to the temple of Asclepius offers the audience a reminder of the healing outlets available to them within close proximity. The nearness of a Dionysian space of madness and contradiction to a space of healing is consistent with the Greek ideas of both sickness and madness as outside forces acting upon the subject, who then requires outside forces to heal the *nosoi* imposed from without. The theater space functions as a religious process that works from outside to heal the spectator in some way, as the incubation process in the temple works to heal the body from an outside affliction. In *Philoctetes*, this process is emphasized by the deictic reference to the Asclepeion and by the presence of Asclepian healing within the play. I argue that Sophocles calls attention to this process with the vivid nosological language that describes Philoctetes' suffering, and the potent eremitic language that points out his isolation from society. I argue that this eremitic language is

made even more powerful by the setting of the play on the deserted island of Lemnos and detailed the mythological and religious associations with the island that work to make the healing associations more evident. My interpretation of *Philoctetes* traces the development of catharsis from a process that takes place on stage in *Ajax* to a process that both takes place on stage, in the form of Philoctetes' reintegration, and is suggested to the audience and made explicitly connected to the cult of Asclepius through the proximity of the temple and through deictic references.

In conclusion, my study has aimed to develop an understanding of how catharsis can be used as an interpretive technique for tragic drama, and in particular, as a process used prior to Aristotle's brief articulation of catharsis in *Poetics*. In doing so, I have found that reading *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* as stages in the development of Sophocles' conception of catharsis can provide a fruitful contribution to how Aristotle possibly understood the term "catharsis" and perhaps lead to further work on a pre-Aristotelian understanding of catharsis.

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