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THE AUDIENCE ON STAGE: RHETORIC, EMOTION, AND JUDGEMENT IN SOPHOCLEAN THEATRE.

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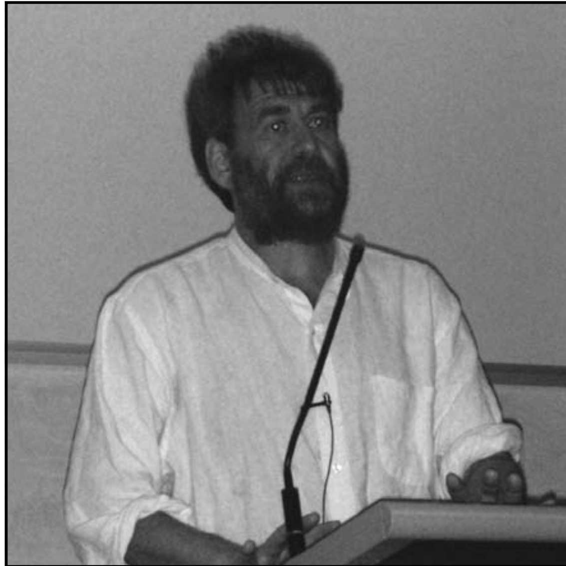

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Democracy – and its malcontents – requires a theory of the audience.[1]

In ancient Athenian participatory democracy, the audience, in its different forms, can be seen as a privileged arena in which citizenship is enacted. The citizen performs his civic duty as a juror in the law court, as a voter in the assembly, as a spectator in the theatre, and even as a *theoros* in the *agones* of festivals. In each case, the role of audience member is to listen, to judge, to vote. By fulfilling one's role as a listening, voting member of a collective audience, a citizen engages in *ta politika*, the political life of the city.[2] Consequently, in the classical era the discussion of persuasion spreads far beyond the formal rhetorical techniques for speakers as enshrined in the rhetorical handbooks, in order to scrutinise the intellectual and emotional practice of being in an audience – both from the point of view of the speaker (double guessing his audience) and from the point of view of being the listener (critically responding to a speaker), and, most importantly, as a dynamic exchange, a battle of wills, between the two.[3] Rhetoric works, which is why it is taught, practised and feared. If words have power, if the weaker argument can be made the stronger, if to be persuaded is to lose authority or self-determination to another, how can one listen and not be a victim of words? How can one properly perform one's role as a judging, responsible citizen, faced by the swirl of competing arguments which make up the political discourse of Athens?

These questions were explored in different genres with differing degrees of theoretical explicitation. Gorgias, for example, is fascinated by the psychology of the passive audience – thrilled, manipulated, led, and yet still resistant.[4] Thucydides' Cleon mocks, cajoles and bullies the citizens in the assembly through an explicit discussion

1 I have had a further go at thinking about audiences in Goldhill (1994), (1997), and (2000), which has been critically discussed in Nightingale (2004) who offers a different context for ideas of *theoria*. See most recently Revermann (2006). A very long bibliography could be given for audiences for tragedy: for two exemplary versions of the potential of audience studies see Orgel (1975) and Thomas (2002).

2 A huge bibliography could be given for this: see in particular Lanni (1997) (with the added background on Lanni (2006)); Sinclair (1988); Hansen (1991); Boegehold and Scafuro (eds) (1994); Finley (1983); Ober and Hedrick edd (1996); Cartledge, Millett and Todd (eds) (1990); Ober (1989); Meier (1990); Loraux (1981) – each with further bibliography.

3 See for discussion in particular Hesk (2000); also Ober (1989); Buxton (1982); Ford (2002); Jarratt (1991); Wardy (1996).

4 See Wardy (1996), with further bibliography.

of their passivity, their capacity for pleasured inaction.[5] Demosthenes too teases and twists the Athenians with their own awareness of their reputation for a love of words and an inability to follow up plans with action: complicity as pressure towards collective action.[6] Plato's snarling image of the crowd in democracy as a beast titillated and fed by the politicians, who are themselves slaves to the mood of the beast, articulates a philosophical disdain for the dynamic of speaker and audience in public political life, which is matched by the comic scalpel of Aristophanes' theatre, where the character Demos – the People – allows his slaves licence to flatter and steal before he finally comes to his (self-interested) senses.[7] Aristotle, through the category of the enthymeme, theorises persuasion fully in terms of the collective expectations of a mass audience, and laments the philosopher's inability to get it quite right, where a man of the street can sway a crowd.[8]

Democracy requires a theory of the audience both in the sense that its institutional processes are predicated on such a theory, and in the sense that it does not yet possess such a theory in a fully worked out form.

I want to argue here that Sophoclean theatre is an excellent place to think about the audience of democracy. My main concern is not with the constitution of the fifth-century Athenian audience as such. Nor is it to question the trivial rhetoric with which so many critics have continued to use the imagined audience as a bastion for their own opinions ('surely no audience would…', 'the audience would instantly recognise…'). Rather, I want here to look at how Sophocles dramatises the process of being (in) an audience: how does Sophocles put the audience on stage?

Now, tragedy as a genre of staged dialogue is obviously full of audiences: every speech is addressed to someone who could be said to be its audience; even monologues are spoken before a chorus. What's more, tragedy is also a genre of misunderstanding or of multiple and conflicting understandings. Characters use the same words in different ways, as Vernant influentially expressed it, and the clash between these tensions and ambiguities is a motive force of the plotting of tragedy: tragic language displays the difficulties of the city's developing political language to the audience of the city through the failure of the actors on stage to avoid the violent outcome of their own misunderstandings.[9] All of this is fundamental to tragedy's functioning in the city as a political genre. But I want to focus on a specific dramatic device of creating an audience on stage beyond the omnipresent chorus, and beyond the addressee of any particular speech. It is a device which Sophocles uses often and with insistent interest; it is made possible largely by the use of the third actor, an innovation

5 Thucydides III 38; the rhetoric of Thucydides, in comparison with, say, Herodotus or Tacitus, is not as thoroughly discussed as one might expect. See for the types of discussion available e.g. Cogan (1981); Crane (1996), and more recently and more congenially Price (2001); Rood (2004) and Morrison (2006).

6 I am thinking, for example, of *Olynthiac* II 12: but see more generally Ober (1989) and Hesk (2000).

7 See Aristophanes' *Knights* with the not wholly satisfactory McGlew (2002).

8 Aristotle *Rhetoric* II 22. See Wardy (1996) 108–38; and more generally Furley and Nehemas (eds) (1994).

9 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1981); in general see Goldhill (1986), especially chapter 3.

which Sophocles is said to have introduced; and it demonstrates, I believe, a sustained engagement with the widest implications of democracy's audience.

This dramatic strategy is best introduced by a simple and very well-known example. The opening scene of the *Ajax* brings on stage Odysseus, sniffing around the tent of Ajax. Athene – who may or may not be seen by the audience[10] – lets Odysseus into the plot so far, and announces she will bring the mad Ajax out from the tent – much to Odysseus' discomfort. This sets up the discussion between the still enraged and maddened Ajax and the goddess – which is overheard by Odysseus. He is an audience on stage, who is silent and concealed from the protagonist, and who acts as a focaliser for the audience in the theatre. When Ajax leaves, Athene turns towards Odysseus and asks (*Ajax* 118): 'Do you *see*, Odysseus, how great the power of the gods is?' But Odysseus sees something else (*Ajax* 124–6): 'I do not look to his case more than my own. For I see that we who live are nothing more than images or a vain shadow.' Odysseus takes Athene's generalisation about the gods, and makes it a generalisation about mortals. Where she offered him the objectification of a judgement on a once great man, Odysseus takes his own position ('I know' [121], 'I see' [125]) and puts it together with that potential objectification but through a gesture of pity or compassion discovers from the 'his' (τὸ τούτου) and the 'my' (τοὐμόν) the 'we' (ἡμᾶς) in the example. Not only does Odysseus recognise the weakness of humans where Athene declared the strength of the gods, but also this perspective allows him to bypass the aggression of human hates and violence. This shift of perspective is marked in the repeated words of seeing: 'do you see?' asks Athene; 'I see', replies Odysseus – but what he sees is indeed his own shadow, his own likeness: not just the emptiness of human achievement, but how each human is an image of each other in their weakness and suffering.

Of course, this short dialogue looks forward to the closing scene of the play, where Odysseus effects a closure by persuading the Greek leaders to control their antipathy to Ajax.[11] But the scene depends on constructing Odysseus as an audience on stage. The emphasis on what he has seen and understood of the scene, stage-managed in front of him by Athene, creates an image of the critical observer – an observer who does not simply follow the stage directions of the goddess, but takes his own view of what has happened. This image of the critical observer offers a model for the audience in the theatre, faced as they will be by Ajax's deception speech and the chorus' delighted reaction to it, and by the violent row over the worth of Ajax between Teucer, Menelaus and Agamemnon. The difference between Athene's view of the scene and Odysseus' creates a space for the audience to discover its own critical distance from the violent and extreme words on stage.

10 See Taplin (1978) 185 n12 insists she is visible to all, including Odysseus. Segal (1995) 19 thinks she is invisible to Odysseus (as does Jebb). Hesk (2003) pp. 43–4, most recently, hedges his bets. See also Heath (1987) pp. 165–6; Garvie (1998) 124.

11 See e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1980) 66–72; and in most detail, Whitlock Blundell (1989) especially pp. 60–8 and pp. 5–105.

The *Philoctetes* is deeply concerned with persuasion, trust, and with staged scenes.[12] The audience in the theatre not only watches the extended twists and turns of the characters' interactions, but also watches their reactions to staged scenes. So the False Merchant's message prompts different responses from all the characters on stage, as we watch Philoctetes being gulled, Neoptolemus responding both to the off-stage prompting of Odysseus and to the fresh material released by the False Merchant; and the chorus responding both to their master, Neoptolemus, and to the object of their pursuit, Philoctetes, as well as to the False Merchant himself. The play is filled with such complex layers of dramatic cross-currents.

But I wish to focus here on the end of the great central episode, where Odysseus returns on stage for the first time since the opening moments of the play. We have watched Neoptolemus respond to Philoctetes, though it is often hard to tell precisely how much of his emotional response is genuine, and how much required by the plot against the hero. When Philoctetes first starts to show the painful physical symptoms of his wound, Neoptolemus seems powerfully moved (*Phil.* 759–81):

> ἰὼ ἰὼ δύστηνε σύ,
> δύστηνε δῆτα διὰ πόνων πάντων φανείς.
> βούλῃ λάβωμαι δῆτα καὶ θίγω τί σου.
> Oh, oh, wretched you,
> Really wretched, it's revealed, in all your sufferings.
> Do you want me really to hold you and touch you somehow?

Notice how the repetitions, especially of δῆτα, ['really'] indicate a strongly emotional expressivity. Are we to see this as part of Neoptolemus' plotting, playing his role to perfection? Or is it his true emotions of pity boiling to the surface? It is very rare to see the particle *dêta* repeated in the same couplet like this: is this the sign of real grief? Or an over the top attempt to convey how really, really upset he is? What is being 'revealed' here?[13]

Shortly after this, when Philoctetes collapses into agony, Neoptolemus goes quiet: Philoctetes in desperate pain cries out (805): 'What are you saying? Why are you silent? Where on earth are you, child?' Neoptolemus replies (806): 'For a long time in fact I have been upset, grieving over your misfortune'. As Neoptolemus watches Philoctetes in agony, we watch and evaluate his reaction. It seems powerfully felt, yet thirty-five lines later he is celebrating the success of the first part of the plot as Philoctetes sleeps: no remorse or regret is evident.

Neoptolemus' silence, highlighted in these earlier scenes, becomes an even more powerful dramatic resource as Odysseus' entrance is approached.[14] Neoptolemus,

12 See Easterling (1978); also especially Segal (1981) pp. 328–61; also Roberts (1989); Ringer (1998) pp. 101–26.

13 Segal (1981) pp. 335–6 followed by Pucci (2003) *ad loc* notes the extraordinary delicacy of τι in this line: 'shall I touch you *in some way/in some place*' – the hesitancy and intimacy conveyed by this small word is indeed remarkable.

14 See, with useful general background, Montiglio (2000) pp. 247–8.

now with Philoctetes' bow in his possession, has revealed to Philoctetes the plot against him – but has refused to give back the bow since 'justice and expediency constrain me to listen to those in authority'. Philoctetes bitterly laments, and desperately pleads for recognition and the return of his bow. His speech returns three times to Neoptolemus' silence and its possible significance (934–5): 'But he will not even address me. He looks away again, as if he will never release the bow'; 'Please now be yourself still. What do you say? You are silent. I am nothing, a wretched man.' (950–1); 'May you not yet perish, until I know if you will change your judgement' (961–2): a plea that receives no answer. (Looking away, looking down, breaking visual contact becomes a trope in rhetoric as much as in poetry, and in art too, a recognised somatics of disengagement.[15]) This extended attempt at persuasion – at breaking through Neoptolemus' silence – prompts the chorus to ask their master what they should do, and Neoptolemus confesses that a strange sense of pity has come over him, not just now but for some time since (963–6), lines that recall his response to the physical symptoms of Philoctetes earlier. οἴμοι τί δράσω, 'Alas what am I to do?' (969), asks Neoptolemus – the archetypal tragic question – and τί δρῶμεν, ἄνδρες, 'What are we to do, men?' (974). It is at this moment of hesitation – a half line – that Odysseus enters to take control of the scene.

He enters into a strident row with Philoctetes; Philoctetes has to be held down as he threatens to kill himself; by the end of the scene, Philoctetes is left quite humiliated and isolated, as the Greeks prepare to sail off with the bow. What is striking about the dramaturgy of this scene is that Neoptolemus is silent from the entrance of Odysseus to the final moment of the action. He is an audience to the row between Philoctetes and Odysseus.[16] His silence prompts two questions. First, especially after Philoctetes has drawn attention to the significance of silence, and Neoptolemus has indicated his own growing feelings of pity, what are the emotions with which Neoptolemus watches these two older men fight? Second, especially after Neoptolemus has twice asked what to do, what is he going to do?

These questions are made insistent by the staging of the end of the scene. Philoctetes turns to Neoptolemus at last (1066–7): 'Child of Achilles, will I be not addressed by even your voice? Will you go away like this?' – a question which draws attention both to his silence and to his actions. But Odysseus replies by addressing Neoptolemus (1068–9): 'Go! Don't look at him, noble though you are, lest you mar our fortunes'. Odysseus does not let him speak, ushers him out – and is clearly worried that his character will lead him to damage their venture. The audience is again encouraged to wonder about Neoptolemus' potential responses, as his silence is drawn attention to. So Philoctetes tries the chorus (1070-1): 'Will I really be actually left in this way deserted by you, friends? Will you not pity me?'. These questions recall Neoptolemus' growing pity as well as the chorus' earlier feelings. But their answer recalls their own

15 On art see Frontisi-Ducroux (1995); on rhetoric and audience noise see Bers (1985) and Hall (2006) pp. 363–6, and in general Boegehold (1999).

16 Seale (1982) 29: the scene 'invites the audience to watch Neoptolemus' action, to observe him observe'.

diffident questions earlier, addressed to Neoptolemus, of what they should do (1072–3): 'This boy is our commander. Whatever he says to you, we too must say.' They cannot act critically or with any form of self-determination, because of their role in the hierarchy. But notice their expression 'whatever he *says* to you, we too must say' – after 100 lines of silence, there is mounting and conflicting pressure on Neoptolemus to say something (and mounting expectation for the audience in the theatre). Will he express pity again? Will he bow to those in authority? Will he answer?

His response is perhaps something of a surprise. Neoptolemus does not address Philoctetes. He replies to his crew. He does allude to his feelings, but only in passing as he indicates that he will follow his commanding officer's instructions (1074–80):

> I will get a reputation for fulsome pity from him [Odysseus].
> But, stay, if it seems good to him [Philoctetes],
> For as much time as the sailors need
> To prepare the boat and we to pray to the gods.
> Perhaps in the meanwhile he [Philoctetes] will find some
> Better thinking with regard to us. We two are departing, then.
> When we summon you, come quickly.

This is a markedly unemotional speech after his turmoil before. He does not express pity, but notes he will get a reputation for it. He does not address a word to Philoctetes, who begged to hear him speak to him, but merely hopes – in the third person – that he will change his attitude. He is clearly bonded with Odysseus ('we two' – the dual in Greek), and, after his apparently anguished questions about what to do, now he has no doubt: he is following those in command, and leaving, and instructs the crew to join them promptly. The speech seems functional and clear. It is as if Neoptolemus in his role as audience has moved from his confusion and wavering emotion now to a certain distance from his own earlier feelings, and a clarity about what he is to do.

Yet when he returns on stage in the next scene pursued by the extremely worried Odysseus, it is, as he puts it, 'to undo all the wrongs I have done previously' (1224). They face off against each other as each threatens to draw a sword (1254-5). Even here though, action is deferred, and it is, initially, words that Neoptolemus announces he is bringing to Philoctetes. There is much we could say about this scene as the culmination of the thematics of persuasion. But, above all, Neoptolemus' change of heart requires a re-reading of the previous scene, his apparent hardening of spirit. Now we are encouraged to see more tension beneath his performance, more doubt within him than was expressed to Odysseus. His role as audience develops as a fully active process, part of the questions of character, truthfulness, deception, questions which the figure of Neoptolemus raises throughout the drama.

The silence of Neoptolemus in his role as audience becomes a sign to be read and re-read by the audience in the theatre (and by the characters on stage): it becomes a

hermeneutic crux – part of the play's fascination with speech acts. However the silence was read first time (hardening? deception? self-deception? desperate attempt to toe the line?), the return of Neoptolemus demands a re-evaluation of his earlier performance. Who is Neoptolemus deceiving as he leaves the stage with Odysseus? Philoctetes – either because he is still fully engaged with the plot against him or because he is denying his strong feelings towards him by maintaining his silence? Odysseus – because he no longer will be able to uphold his position within the plot, but acts as if he can? Himself – because in his rejection of Philoctetes, he is either pretending he can repress the feelings that will erupt in the next scene or because he still thinks that 'obeying those in command' is an adequate criterion for ethical action? Or all of these…? The complexity of ethical judgement here is created for us, the audience, by watching Neoptolemus watching – that is, by the audience on stage.

Sophocles brilliantly creates a question of character for the audience, not only by Neoptolemus' change of mind but also by giving him no words to say through a crucial scene.[17] Neoptolemus' silence becomes a screen on which the audience projects its interpretation of what he is thinking or feeling. The device of the audience on stage becomes a way here of engaging the audience in the theatre in the processes of moral choice and doubt – wondering about character and action. The audience on stage becomes the lynch pin of the play's provocation of the audience in the theatre.

Electra uses the device of the audience on stage in the most striking way three times, and constructs through this an extraordinary self-reflexive commentary on tragic emotion. Clytemnestra's muffled prayer to Apollo (634-59), a grotesque speech act, receives ironic and instant response with the arrival of the Paidagogus with the false news of Orestes' death. The Paidagogus' news, and especially his long speech that describes Orestes' fatal chariot crash, is delivered to three audiences: Clytemnestra, the chorus and Electra (as well, of course, as the fourth audience in the theatre). The difference in response is drawn attention to immediately: Electra cries out (674), and the queen bursts out with 'What do you say, stranger? What do you say? Don't listen to her!' Electra is to be the excluded audience. So Clytemnestra requests the whole story with: 'You [Electra] do your own stuff! But for me, stranger, you tell me the truth, how he died.' (678-9).

The speech is a celebrated, riveting narrative. The response is threefold. The chorus laments the destruction of the family, the loss of the child who offers the hope of generational continuity (764-5). But Clytemnestra is less univocal (766-8): 'O Zeus, what is this? Should I call it good fortune, or terrible [deinav] but profitable news? It is bitter, when my own disasters save my life'. This surprises the Paidagogus, who had thought his news unmixed pleasure for her. She explains with the memorable line δεινὸν τό τίκτειν ἐστίν, 'it is a strange thing to give birth' (770), where the nuanced and hard to translate *deinon* ('awesome', 'terrible', 'amazing', 'strange') picks

17 On character in tragedy see Easterling (1973); Easterling (1977); Easterling (1990); see also Gould (1978); Goldhill (1990).

up her previous line 'terrible' (*deina*), and gives the word a different spin, indicating her difficulty of finding the expression for her confused feelings. She finally turns towards her daughter. Electra has not spoken for 110 lines. She has been the audience both to the speech and to the reactions to it. Her reaction is…what?

There are two general points I want to make on Electra's response. First, she takes up the role of a focaliser for the audience, and, in particular, the audience on stage, the chorus (804-7):

> ἆρ' ὑμὶν ὡς ἀλγοῦσα κὠδυνωμένη
> δεινῶς δακρῦσαι κἀπικωκῦσαι δοκεῖ
> τὸν υἱὸν ἡ δύστηνος ὧδ' ὀλωλότα;
> ἀλλ' ἐγγελῶσα φροῦδος.
> So did she seem to you to weep and wail
> Terribly [*deinôs*], like one grieving, in pain,
> The wretched woman for her son, perished like that?
> No, she went out laughing.

Electra has been an audience to the queen's response, and now tries to direct her audience's response to what she has been watching. *Deinôs*, 'terribly', seems to echo the queen's search for a response (*deina* 767, *deinon* 770), now with a bitter and sarcastic tone.[18] It should seem (*dokei*) like an act to them, she asserts: '*like* [ὡς] one grieving'. The queen was laughing, declares her daughter. There was nothing in the Paidagogus' response to indicate the queen was anything but moved, nor was there anything in her exit line to indicate that she was (literally) laughing. How good an audience is Electra? Is she accurately describing her mother's arrant and finely performed hypocrisy? Or is she quick to find an emotionally overwrought and aggressive slant on her hated mother's more complex feelings? The tension between Electra's reaction to her mother, and the mother's reaction to the news, throws up a question about each. Should we really read the queen's *deinon* to *tiktein estin*, 'it is a strange thing to give birth', as a *kekrummenên baxin*, a 'concealed utterance'? Should we really read Electra's declaration of her mother's hypocrisy as a distorted exaggeration? Electra's role as (problematic) audience on stage raises for the audience in the theatre a self-reflexive concern about its own role in evaluating the emotions and words in front of them. What to see in Clytemnestra's or Electra's reactions?

This leads to my second point about Electra's response, a point which will return more insistently in the second scene of an audience on stage in this play. We watch Electra responding to a speech with her customary strength of feeling: the scene is written so that we watch not only the Paidagogus' masterful performance, but also the three audiences to it, and perhaps especially the pain of Electra as a contrast to

18 As Reinhardt (1979) 142 comments brilliantly (with regard to the more obvious example of 287ff), 'to make known what she has suffered, Electra must start to imitate the voice she hates'.

the feelings of Clytemnestra. Yet we also know that the speech is a fiction. As an audience to a fiction, we are watching audiences to a fiction.[19]

This self-reflexivity becomes most pointed when the urn arrives (the second scene of an audience on stage). The speech that Electra delivers over it is one of the most moving in Greek tragedy, as she – along with the metre and sentence structure – breaks down in grief. This outpouring is watched by Orestes, the audience on stage, who in turn becomes overwhelmed by his feelings, and reveals himself. As Electra weeps, we know she is grieving over an empty urn: passionate grief over a fiction – the paradox of tragic emotion, where audiences cry over what they know to be staged action. Yet Orestes, who also knows that the urn does not contain his ashes, is also so moved by his sister's grief that he cannot control his tongue. Critics have made much of the metatheatricality of the urn here. The urn, writes Segal paradigmatically, 'functions as a symbol of the deception of the theatrical situation per se… The urn embodies the paradoxical status of truth in dramatic fiction. It is a work of elaborate artifice… which gathers around itself the power of language to deceive or to establish truth. It functions, then, as a symbol of the play itself, a work whose falsehood (fiction) embodies truth'.[20] This is a strong reading of how the play's interests in *logos* and *ergon*, on deception, and on staged scenes, come together to provoke a question about tragedy's status. But the grief over the empty urn also asks what I think is a more insistent and troubling question about the audience.

Electra's emotions have the ability to sway Orestes even when he knows they are based on a falsehood, even when it threatens his own plot. As an audience in the theatre too, it is hard to watch the outpouring of her grief without being affected. Electra, in turn, has been wholly swayed by the false speech of the Paidagogus. The difficulty of resisting the lure of *logos*, the difficulty of resisting the persuasion of another's emotions, reveal the fragility of the self-control of the audience on stage, and – this is where the self-reflexivity hits home – the audience in the theatre, the audience of democracy. The image of the responsible, judging, critical citizen – the bedrock of democratic decision making – is thrown hard up against the emotional distortions and self-deceptions of our watching Orestes watching Electra. We could put the question starkly for the audience watching these audiences on stage: how like Electra and Orestes are you (prepared to be)?

The final scene of the play is the most stage-managed scene of all. Orestes brings on stage the dead body of Clytemnestra, shrouded, concealed. In the *Oresteia*, Orestes appeared over the dead bodies of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra to display to the citizens of Argos the end of the double tyranny. Here instead we have an exquisite scene of staged nastiness. Electra has greeted Aegisthus with a finely acted show of stoic grief – exactly what she had accused her mother of. It is one of the grim ironies of this play how Electra fulfils her own heated remarks to Clytemnestra (619-21):

19 See Segal (1981) pp. 278–91; Ringer (1998) pp. 127–212.

20 Segal (1986) 128. See also Ringer (1998); Batchelder (1995).

'Hatred from you and your actions compel me by force to do these things: shameful deeds are taught by shameful deeds'. Electra shows what she has inherited and been taught as she leads a man to his death by her deceptive words. Aegisthus instructs Orestes to uncover the body. Orestes fends this off: 'It is yours to see this and to address in a loving, familial way' (1470-1). Aegisthus calls for Clytemnestra, and, with studied irony, Orestes declares (1474): 'She is near; don't look anywhere else'. As Aegisthus unveils the body, he is observed by both Orestes and Electra, an actor in their drama. Aegisthus will be taken into the house finally to be slaughtered.

Here the very brief moment of the audience on stage is constructed as a fantasy of control. The two avengers, for so long the victims, set up the scene and direct it with precision. At last they have Aegisthus in their power, and they revel in their position by their play-acting and heavy irony. Yet the ending of the play, in typically Sophoclean style, opens up more problematic vistas. This question is usually discussed by critics in terms of the absence of Furies or the lack of moral response to the act of matricide within the play. Where Aeschylus had taken a further play to resolve the tensions set in motion by the god-ordered matricide and had brought a trial on stage to find a resolution, Sophocles' aggressive silence leaves the question for the audience in the theatre. The future is alluded to in a way which encourages the audience to reflect on what is to happen next: Aegisthus and Orestes talk pointedly of prophecy and who can know what the future will bring. Aegisthus wonders if the house of the Pelopids will always suffer. But what interests me most is the way in which the control of the avengers, and in particular Electra, is undercut.

Electra's role in this last scene is fascinating. She concludes her brief dialogue with Aegisthus in this way (1464-5):

> καὶ δὴ τελεῖται τἀπ' ἐμοῦ· τῷ γὰρ χρόνῳ
> νοῦν ἔσχον, ὥστε συμφέρειν τοῖς κρείσσοσιν.
> See! My part is being fulfilled. In time
> I have gained wisdom, so that I accede to those more powerful.

Kai dê indicates that she is actually doing what she says she is doing: it acts as a deictic particle drawing attention to her own performance. *Teleitai* is, as ever, difficult to translate with one English word. It implies fulfilment as well as closure; an end that can be death; a paying (back). At one level she is indicating to Aegisthus that her old life is finished, and that she will fulfil his commands. At another, she is underlining her own role in the fulfilment of the vengeance. (One could almost translate: 'Look! My part is being acted out…') Her irony is continued in her expressed willingness to accede to those more powerful – a double edged irony since it is not clear exactly what the more powerful forces at work in Electra's narrative here might be; and this irony marks her own sense of growing power, her sense of control. The last word of the play, however, is τελεωθέν, 'finished', 'consummated', 'ended'. Self-reflexive, of course, and a superb way of highlighting the tension between the end of the play and the open-endedness of the action: how ended is this end? It also reframes Electra's use

of *teleitai*. How much in control of her narrative is she? How certain can she be of the end she is pursuing? The ironic ambiguity of the word *teleisthai*, which Electra manipulates, is, by the end of the play, turned against her.

Her own last word has a similar doubleness. Aegisthus asks to say a few last remarks, and Electra interrupts demanding his silence. Every character in the play has tried to shut Electra up. Now she demands silence of her enemy. She requires his instant death. 'Only this', she declares, 'could provide release for my ills of old' (1489–90). Her final word is *lutêrion* 'release'. This is a charged word in Sophocles. Every character who thinks they have found *lusis*, 'release', is mistaken, and usually finds that what they thought was release is bringing them into deeper disaster.[21] So what happens to Electra at the end of the play? What release can she hope for once the hatred that has dominated her life no longer has an object? How much self-deception is there in this hope for release? Where Electra had expressed her control over Aegisthus through irony, here she is the victim of the irony in her own words.

Electra and Orestes set up a little staging to enact the slaughter of Aegisthus. Their superiority and control are performed in their irony and their stage-management as much as in the physical act of revenge. Yet the superiority and control of each are fragile. Neither Orestes as *mantis* of the future, nor Electra in her belief in release can throw off the pall of self-deception. Of being locked into a tragic, over-determined narrative, which is beyond their control. Electra and Orestes as audience to their own staged drama of the tricking of Aegisthus reveal the illusions of control which power gives to an audience.

Electra gives us multiple audiences on stage. It shows us multiple responses and multiple interpretations of audiences. It shows us the audience losing control to overwhelming emotions. It shows the illusion of control in an audience in charge. The *Electra* is a highly provocative play in many ways, but it is provocative specifically for the audience of democracy in that its images of an audience are so hard to reconcile with the ideal of the critical, controlled, authoritative citizen doing his duty in the institutions of the city. It is here that the *Electra*'s self-reflexivity or metatheatricality has a political bite.[22]

My final example is Antigone's *kommos* in the *Antigone*, her lament as she leaves to her death in the cave. She sings in counterpoint with the chorus, and eventually Creon interrupts to hurry her off stage. We cannot be certain that Creon is on stage throughout the scene: but Griffiths considers it likely that he is (his entrance is otherwise unannounced and unmotivated), and the lyrics continue after his entrance. I would like to consider the implications if he is on stage.

21 See Goldhill (forthcoming).

22 I am here tacitly disagreeing with Griffin's opinion that Sophocles' *Electra* is fundamentally unpolitical: Griffin (1999), followed and extended by Finglass (2005), (2007), though I am not persuaded by Macleod (2001). The discussions of metatheatricality in Segal (1981) and Ringer (1998) do not broach the political adequately.

Antigone enters processing as in a funeral march, but singing her own funeral dirge (a bizarre ritual performance allowed by her strange circumstances). The traditional *kommos* is antiphonal, and involves consolation from the group to the individual mourner as well as shared, often incantatory expressions of grief.[23] The exchanges between the chorus and Antigone in this scene construct a delicate and subtle interplay as she mourns and they switch between consolation and condemnation, and she asks for sympathy by her laments but also successively alienates herself from her surroundings. Antigone in her first stanza (806-816) marks herself as 'the bride of Hades', the conventional sign of the virgin who dies before marriage.[24] The chorus respond with a standard consolation for young death (usually expressed for a young man, however) that she will have fame and praise for her death.[25] But they add: ἀλλ' αὐτόνομος ζῶσα μόνη δὴ θνατῶν Ἀίδαν καταβήσῃ, 'but of independent will, alive, alone, bereft of mortals, you will descend to Hades' (821-2).[26] The *alla* 'but' marks a transition from praise. She has brought about her death by her own actions, her own self-willed activity. She has set herself apart, and hence is *mone*, 'on her own', 'bereft of human beings'. As Griffiths notes, 'their tone is hard to gauge'. While they console (one function of the chorus in a *kommos*), they also distance themselves from her behaviour.[27]

Antigone finds a parallel for her death in Niobe. But the chorus respond with: 'But she was a goddess and god born. We are mortal and born of mortals. And to be sure it is a great thing for one who has passed away, even to have it said of her that she received shares with demigods while living and after she died'. The recognition of inevitable mortality is a cliché of consolation; if it sounds like a mild correction of Antigone's likening herself to Niobe (*alla* 'but'), the remainder of their words still (*kaitoi*) recognise the glory of being like a demigod. Again they both pull away and draw closer to Antigone. But she is outraged by their utterance: 'Alas, I am mocked! Why do you humiliate me?', she explodes. She rejects any of the consolation as an insult. Where the chorus called her 'alone', she declares herself to be 'unwept by

23 On mourning, see in general Alexiou (2002); Dué (2003), and, best of all, Foley (2001) esp. pp. 19–56, 145–71.

24 See King (1983), (1998) and for the significance of the role of the Parthenos for Antigone, see Goldhill (1990).

25 These lines have been much discussed. On the difficulty of this praise see Knox (1964) 176–7 n8. Denniston (1934) 436 suggests that the 'livelier ou[koun seems more appropriate…while the quieter interrogative οὐκοῦν is also possible' and translates 'Well, are you not dying a glorious death?'. He adds that Jebb's strong reading 'therefore' here is 'inappropriate'.

26 Jebb translates: 'No, mistress of your own fate, and still alive, thou shalt pass to Hades, as no other of mortal kind hath passed'. This translation is in line with his wholly positive image of Antigone. αὐτόνομος, however, is not a simply positive term: it means more 'self-willed', 'using one's own law', which in democratic terms, especially for a woman, is not as grand as 'mistress of one's own fate', nor as positive. Nor is μόνη δὴ θνατῶν likely to mean 'the only one of humans [to suffer this]'. Not only is it simply and crassly untrue: how can Antigone be the first person to be put to death like this? But also and more importantly the word μόνος has been a thematically marked word for Antigone, in her separation from the community, from her sister and from her family. See p. 941. On Antigone's moral status, see especially Foley (2001) pp. 172–200; also Sourvinou-Inwood (1990) with Foley (1995).

27 On the *kommos*, a much discussed passage, see Reinhardt (1979) 80–4; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 136–146; Knox (1964) esp. 176–7; Whitlock Blundell (1989) 147–8; Burton (1980) 118–27; Segal (1981) 177–183; Gardiner (1987) 91–3; and Blake Tyrrell and Bennett (1998) 97–121; all with the background of Foley (2001) 19–56; 172–200. I will not add a bibliography here on Antigone's long, final rhesis, which is not relevant to my current discussion.

friends', and, in an extraordinary phrase, a 'resident alien among neither mortals nor a corpse with corpses, neither with the alive nor the dead' (850-1). Antigone is truly separated here from all bonds: she cannot find a home either with living or dead.

The chorus responds in emotionally-heightened lyric metre with their most outspoken condemnation of her behaviour: 'You stepped out to the furthest extreme of boldness; you smashed your foot against the high pedestal of Justice. You paid for your father's sin'. She committed a transgression and in so doing indicated her inheritance from her transgressive father. Matching her (self)-isolating expression, the chorus distance themselves strongly from her justification. What she did was wrong. But their remark about her father prompts from Antigone a lament for her family's woes. The chorus responds to this with a deeply ambivalent comment (872-5): σέβειν μὲν εὐσέβειά τις, κράτος δ'. ὅτῳ κράτος μέλει, παραβατὸν οὐδαμᾷ πέλει· σὺ δ' αὐτόγνωτος ὤλεσ' ὀργά, "There is a certain piety in showing pious reverence. But to one whose business is power, power cannot be transgressed. Your self-willed temper has destroyed you'. They allow a certain (*tis*) piety in what she has done: the play between *eusebeia* (which I have translated 'piety') and *sebein* ('show pious reverence') recognises Antigone's claim that what she has done is morally required (*sebein*) and may have a claim on an abstract positive idea of a relation to the gods and to the hierarchies of social order ('reverence'). But they also recognise that what she has done transgresses the dictates of power, which cannot be brooked by those in authority. There is a hesitancy, a striving for qualification in this double evaluation. But their judgement on her attitude is unswerving. Her temper is self-willed: it is a further gloss on *mone*: her temper has left her separate from the community. Hence Antigone's lament that follows: 'Unwept, unfriended, unmarried I am led forth… No friend laments my uncried fate'. Antigone, who had proclaimed herself born to *sumphilein*, 'to share in the bonds and obligations of mutual relations' sees herself finally as deprived of *philoi*, isolated even from sympathy or consolation.

The *kommos*, then, maps a flowing relationship between chorus and young girl, from conversation and consolation through to moral condemnation and isolation. At this point, Creon speaks up in terms that echo what we have seen (883–90): 'No-one would stop wailing before death', he expostulates, 'if it would put off the moment'. So, he upbraids the attendants, get a move on. Take her and leave her "alone and deserted" in the cave. 'Anyway', he concludes, 'She will be deprived of her residency (μετοικίας) on the earth above'. The strange description of life as an '(alien) residency' – as a metic – echoes Antigone's own description of her alienation, and his use of *mone*, 'alone', 'isolated', echoes both the chorus' and her own fears and laments. So what is the effect of having Creon watch the *kommos* and then respond as he does?

In contrast to the *kommos*, where the chorus struggle to find an adequate judgement for Antigone's actions and attitude, where praise, dismissal, consolation and hesitancy rub together, and where Antigone now laments her life, a life which she apparently willingly gave up, Creon is brusque, aggressive, certain and even 'crass', as Griffiths puts it. Where Odysseus as audience on stage in the *Ajax* attempted to offer a

differently nuanced and more sympathetic response to the scene staged before him, Creon reacts in a far *less* nuanced and wholly unsympathetic manner to the scene he watches. When Antigone laments that she has no *philos* to cry for her, her *philos* Creon is watching unmoved. And we are watching him watching. This not only affects an audience's view of the king, but also works to isolate him from the action, an isolation which will increase throughout the rest of the play as his *philoi* are stripped from him one by one, until he ends up, like Antigone, alive but 'no more existing than a nothing' (1325).

One of the great contrasts in the *Antigone* has been regularly ignored by critics. This is the contrast between the ideologues or extremists who see the world according to fixed and exclusive principles, even when these principles lead to self-contradiction and even self-destruction – Creon and Antigone, say – and the characters who try to muddle along in a more complex and less extremely coloured world: the guard who can change his mind, burble for self-preservation, and resist the polarising certainties of political rhetoric; or Ismene, who can care, and fight and wonder, but without the all-embracing extremism of her sister. It is they who survive, perhaps unremembered, but still alive. What we watch when we watch Creon observing the *kommos* is the increasing isolation and stubborness of the ideologue. His distance from the action gives us the distance to observe him.

The effect of putting an audience on stage is to provide a mirror to the audience of its own processes of reaction. It works to distance the audience from a direct emotional absorption and to see itself watching. It has become a standard response to literature in recent years to uncover literature's self-reflexivity, its reflection on the status of fiction, or the materiality of form. Yet it is never likely to be enough of a conclusion to discover that literature is (again) self-reflexive. What Sophocles shows rather is that such self-reflexivity, such dramatisation of the audience on stage, speaks significantly to the social context of democracy in which Athenian drama was written and performed. Theatrical self-reflexivity is a demand for the audience to be (more) self-reflective.

The role of the audience in the Assembly or Law Courts was not merely of theoretical interest in democracy but also a matter of life and death – state policy, individual careers, the future of families and the city, depended on the decisions of a large group of citizens, listening to arguments and making moral, practical and policy decisions. When Thucydides comments that it was eros, 'passionate desire' that led the youth of Athens to vote for the disastrous Sicilian expedition, when Aristophanes sneers that all an orator needed to say was 'gleaming Athens' and the citizens sat on the tips of their buttocks, puffed up with pride, or when Plato describes the Assembly as a collection of cobblers making decisions about high politics, they are all expressing concern (or a harsher antipathy) for democracy's cherished principle of a collective of citizens debating and deciding, as it worked in practice in Athens. Sophocles' drama does not have such explicit political posturing. Rather, setting an audience on stage is a specific dramatic way of opening to question the role of rhetoric, judgement, and

the emotions for the audience of citizens in the theatre, and in the other institutions of the city. It is an encouragement to see oneself watching, and, through such self-reflection, to explore what responsible citizenship might involve. No surprise, then, that the first thing Brecht did after the war was translate Sophocles, or that it was through Sophocles' *Electra* that Hofmannsthal and Strauss so challenged their German audience before the First World War, or that Anouilh's *Antigone* should have led to competing claques of audience applause in post-war France. What makes Sophocles so repeatedly a challenging playwright over the centuries is his ability to get to his audience, to discomfort them – and one of Sophocles' key dramatic devices, I would suggest, is his brilliant construction of the audience on stage.[28]

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