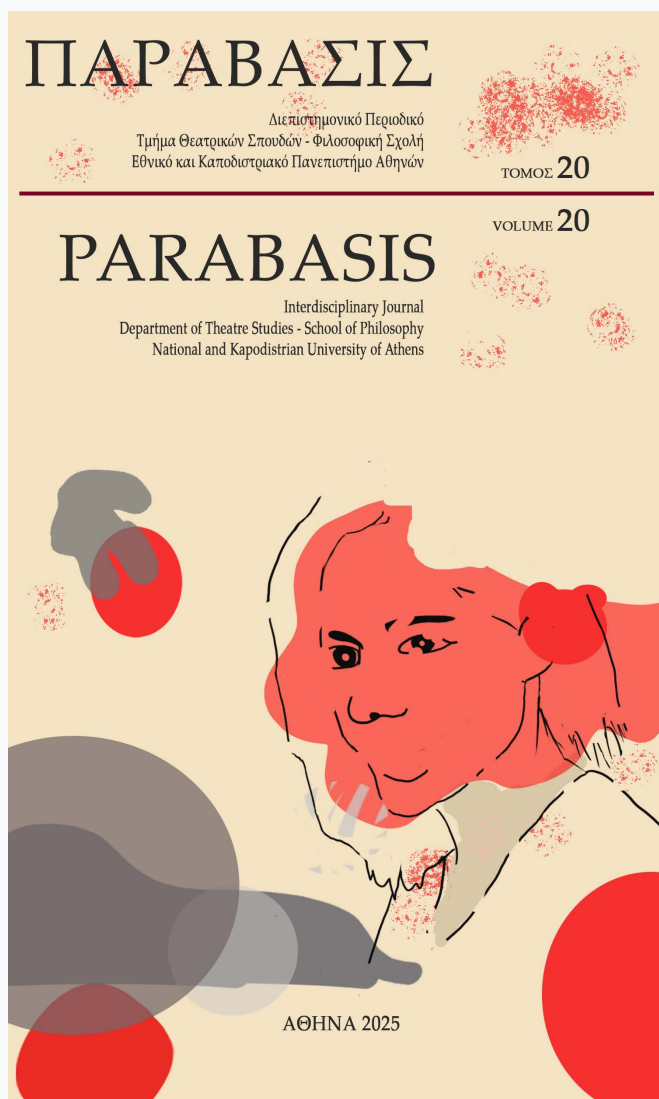


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### INVISIBLE ACTORS IN THE GREEK THEATRE: STAGING THE PROLOGUE OF SOPHOCLES' AJAX

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**INVISIBLE ACTORS IN THE GREEK THEATRE:  
STAGING THE PROLOGUE OF SOPHOCLES' AJAX****The Prologue of *Ajax* (lines 1-133): The three actors on stage**

The play of *Ajax* opens with Odysseus' wanderings on stage until he is halted by the voice of Athena who enters the scene as an invisible goddess. Odysseus cannot see Athena but he can hear her voice who calls him to keep silent in the conversation that follows with the entrance of Ajax. The opening scene is not restricted to human interlocutors as it is the case with the three-actor prologues in the plays of *Electra*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Trachiniae*, but engages the involvement of a divine participant who embodies an exceptional superhuman power on stage. This instance presents a unique dramatic interest in Greek tragedy since Odysseus' speechlessness is screened by the device of invisibility, which is inflicted on him as a result of Athena's intervention. A closer examination of the way that invisibility and speechlessness are brought together and prepared in the words of the prologue would help us to understand how these dramatic devices define the attitudes of the actors on stage and the ways they affect the shaping of the dialogues between the three acting persons. In the prologue of *Ajax*, I will attempt to address the particular question of staging with the actors feigning to be invisible players in this three-way encounter and I will discuss how Athena interacts with Odysseus and Ajax in a close dialogue that emphasizes her earthly involvement with the mortals. The invisibility of Athena might be a wider issue for her appearance either on the ground or on the roof with the use of the *theologeion*. At this point, I will argue that the impact of the triangular effect in dialogue would be enhanced if we assume that Athena appeared on the same level with her interlocutors, as long as the text implies that she remains an invisible actor in front of Odysseus.

At the opening scene of *Ajax*, before any speech is heard, silent activity has already begun with the visual fact of Odysseus' entrance from an *eisodos* which, in this case, leads to the Greek camp, and it would most probably be on the spectators' right side of the scene.<sup>1</sup> Odysseus is hunting Ajax's traces and he circles

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«mysteriously»<sup>2</sup> about in the orchestra until his sight is sharply directed to the door of the stage-building which represents the hut of Ajax on the coast of Troy.<sup>3</sup> There he pauses, when the sound of a voice reaches him.<sup>4</sup> He immediately recognizes the voice of Athena, which is clearly heard although she remains invisible. Odysseus shows no awareness of her presence either in his search or when he pauses before the door of Ajax's hut. It seems that the sort of stage action, which happens while Odysseus addresses his short speech to Athena (between lines 14 and 36), has not been explicitly rendered in the words of the text.<sup>5</sup> On this account, the following alternative explanations could be given: either that Odysseus and the audience are able to see Athena at a certain point, perhaps v. 36,<sup>6</sup> or that the audience only can see her, but she remains totally invisible to Odysseus all the time. The second option marks the contrast that the audience «is privileged to see more than Odysseus does».<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Jebb, *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part VII. The Ajax*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1896, p. 10; Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1977, p. 450-451, and n. 4, argues that «in each particular play the dramatist may set up two separate areas of interest off-stage (besides the building), and so may establish two different and precise directions for the *eisodoi*. Their particular topographical significance is thus confined to one play, and has to be established afresh for each individual tragedy»; cf. also Oliver Taplin «Sophocles in His Theatre», *Sophocle, Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique* 29 (1983), Fondation Hardt, (p. 155-174) p. 157-158.

<sup>2</sup> William M. Calder, «The Entrance of Athena in *Ajax*», *Classical Philology* 60, (1965), p. 115; cf. Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, Methuen & Co Ltd, London 1978, p. 40: «a most unusual dumb-show».

3 The first half of the play takes place in front of Ajax's hut on the Trojan coast (lines 1-814) and the second half moves the scenery in a grove near the sea (lines 815-1420). For a thorough account of the stagecraft in *Ajax*, see now Vayos Liapis, «Genre, Space, and Stagecraft in *Ajax*», Glenn W. Most – Leyla Ozbek (eds), *Staging Ajax's Suicide*, Edizioni della Normale, Scuola Normale Superiore Pisa 2015, p.121-158.

<sup>4</sup> David Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles*, Croom Helm, London 1982, p. 144; Patrick J. Finglass *Sophocles Ajax. Edited with Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, p. 20-22, makes Athena enter from the same *eisodos* as Odysseus after him; cf. Alexander F. Garvie, *Sophocles' Ajax*, Oxbow Books 1998, p.124: «Athena appears from the beginning at ground level, having followed Odysseus (v. 36-7) by the same *eisodos*».

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Richard G.A. Buxton, «Blindness and Limits: Sophocles and the Logic of Myth», *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (1980), p. 22, n.1: «The problem is, rather, that the progress from invisibility to visibility is not charted in the text».

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Heath – Eleanor O'Kell, «Sophocles' *Ajax*: Expect the Unexpected», *Classical Quarterly* 57/2 (2007), p. 2-3 and n.10, doi:/10.1017/S0009838807000456 [12.2.2024], accept the representation of the wood in front of a section of the *skênê* in which Athena «would remain concealed when she first addresses Odysseus and then she moves slowly forward so that Odysseus can see her when they engage in dialogue». However, they also notice that it is uncertain if she does so.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia E. Easterling, «Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy», *Grazer Beiträge*, Supplementband V, Religio Graeco-Romana, Festschrift für Walter Pötscher, Graz-Horn (1993), p. 81.

In line 36 the encounter of Odysseus and Athena continues with a vivid dialogue enhanced with tense stichomythia (v. 38-50, 74-90) up to the moment when a third speaker, Ajax, enters on stage from the main door of the scene and addresses his greetings to the goddess (v. 91). At this point, Athena is exercising the same power as previously, when she made herself invisible, now for the benefit of Odysseus, by rendering him invisible to Ajax's sight. Odysseus becomes the silent witness of Ajax's demented mind while, at the same time, he stands by as the invisible hearer of vehement attacks launched against him by his fierce opponent. There is a common feature in the dialogues with three-actor scenes in Sophocles' plays in which a speaker ceases to speak as soon as a new person makes his entrance. In tragedy, when we see a new entrant on stage, we need to be aware that his entrance signifies the change of dialogue, and in most cases the change of a speaker into a silent witness (e.g. the Nurse's silence after Hyllus' entrance at the beginning of *Trachiniae* or, more accurately, Antigone's silence after the Stranger's entrance at the beginning of *Oedipus at Colonus*). However, in *Ajax*, the audience experience an unusual manner of introducing a new speaker in a three-actor scene: when Ajax comes out of his tent, Odysseus falls silent concealed in the invisibility which is manipulated by Athena. His «invisibility» becomes part of visual imagery but his silence is a theatrical action, which places him in the role of a silent person in this three-actor encounter on stage. During the conversation between Ajax and Athena, Odysseus, though still visible to the spectators, is not only invisible to Ajax but also a speechless figure in the scenic background.

### **The invisible goddess: Athena on the ground or the *theologeion*?**

However, problems arise when we come to explain what the position of Athena is when she starts speaking to Odysseus. The text does not give information as to how the presence of Athena was enacted on the stage. Her position in the theatre when she starts speaking, as well as her stage movements while she remains invisible to Odysseus constitute an unresolved problem of theatrical controversy. Commentators have provided two plausible explanations: (a) Athena appears on the roof of the skene-building as it is the common theatrical practice for the gods' epiphany in tragedy, or (b) she is standing on the ground at the same level with the mortals. According to the first assumption, Calder, following Jebb, summarizes the argument for Athena's appearance on the *theologeion* by pointing out that «the famous fear of Odysseus (v. 74 ff.) is reasonable if he is alone in the orchestra with Ajax».<sup>8</sup> On the other side, Mastronarde accepts an extended use of the roof level and the crane for human characters and gods and he too thinks that Athena appears on

<sup>8</sup> Calder, «The Entrance of Athena», p. 115; Jebb, *Sophocles*, Appendix vol. 15.

high because «the divine and human status» must be defined as operating in different levels.<sup>9</sup> According to the second assumption, Pickard-Cambridge maintains that Odysseus is unable to discern Athena in the first instance, because she appears on the ground concealed in the trees of the grove, which were probably there from the beginning of the play.<sup>10</sup> Apart from the indication in the text that Athena followed the same path as Odysseus (v. 36-37), there is no suggestion that trees of a grove cover the view of her vision. Stanford and Buxton<sup>11</sup> comply also with the view that Athena appears on the ground. The common denominator in the views of Pickard-Cambridge and Stanford is that a long conversation after line 36 cannot be conducted between an actor on the *theologeion* and one on the ground.<sup>12</sup> Beyond that, Taplin convincingly argues that it is doubtful if there was any higher platform (*theologeion*) in the theatre of the late fifth century.<sup>13</sup> The underlying assumption is that textual references and the shaping of the plays have to be taken into account in the application of specific theatrical effects for the classical period.

In her opening words Athena reiterates that she has kept a constant eye upon Odysseus in the past and the present time: «Αεὶ [...] δέδορκά σε» «καὶ νῦν [...] σε [...] ὁρῶ» («I have always seen you», v. 1, «And now I see you», v. 3). After she has been recognized by her voice and addressed by Odysseus, Athena replies that she has been following him watchfully all the way around:<sup>14</sup> «ἔγνων, Ὀδυσσεῦ, καὶ πάλαι φύλαξ

<sup>9</sup> Donald J. Mastronarde, «Actors on High: The Skene Roof, the Crane, and the Gods in Attic Drama», *Classical Antiquity* 9 (1990), p. 247-294. For the use of *mechane* for god appearances on high in the fifth-century theatre, see also H. J. Newiger, «Ekkyklema und Mechane in der Inszenierung des Griechischen Dramas», *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft* 16 (1990), p. 33-42. John R. Green, «On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens», *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 32 (1991), p. 20, n. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1946, p. 48-49; Heath & O'Kelly, «Sophocles' Ajax: Expect the Unexpected», p. 3, seem to follow the same solution for Athena «placed within the wood».

<sup>11</sup> William B. Stanford, *Ajax*, Macmillan, London 1963 on v.15; Buxton, «Blindness and Limits: Sophocles and the Logic of Myth», p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Contra Mastronarde, «Actors on High», p. 278 (and ns. 97, 98), who discards this argument on grounds of «the visual distinction of divine and human status».

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, p. 441: «The only place in surviving tragedy which may call for such a higher platform is the final scene of Euripides' *Orestes*».

<sup>14</sup> However, the closest parallel to *Ajax* is not to be found in a prologue but in the middle of action in *Rhesus* v. 595-674, where Athena's appearance is also obscure by the darkness and Odysseus perceives that she is approaching by her voice. But vocabulary of movement, literally taken, suggests that Athena is acting at stage level; cp. «καθ' ἡμᾶς» v. 627 for Alexandros approaching the goddess and Odysseus, and «παρὰστατεῖν» v. 638 for Athena on the ground in *Rhesus* with «ἔβην εἰς ὁδόν» v. 35-6 for Athena following Odysseus' pace in *Ajax*; contra Marco Fantuzzi, *The Rhesus Attributed to Euripides*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, on *Rhesus* v. 627-629 and v. 630 for Athena being on an elevated position. Graham Ley, «A Scenic Plot of Sophocles' Ajax and Philoctetes», *Eranos* 86 (1988),



ἔβην/τῇ σῇ πρόθυμος εἰς ὁδὸν κυναγία» («I knew it, Odysseus, and some time ago set out on my path, as a guardian eager for your hunt», v. 36-37).<sup>15</sup> Though it would seem uncertain or excessive to think that a goddess has been pursuing Odysseus' investigatory tracks step by step so she has terminated her route where Odysseus stopped, by contrast, we can readily speak with certainty about Odysseus' restless wandering alluding to the terminology of dogs' hunting (κυνηγετοῦντα και μετρούμενον/ἵχνη, v. 5-6, βάσιν κυκλοῦντα, v. 19, ἵχνεύω, v. 20, κατ' ἵχνος ἄσσω, v. 32), or his slight displacement on stage in front of the door of the «skene» (ἐπὶ σκηναῖς ναυτικαῖς, v. 3, εἴσω τῆσδε παπταίνειν πύλης, v. 11), and finally, his careful retreat away from the main door (between lines 68 and 88) for fear of facing Ajax.

Then, it would be theatrically more effective to imagine that, in the first part of the scene, Athena moves slowly in Odysseus' direction, so that she will have made herself visible to the audience by line 36 where Odysseus concludes his long address to her, and this assumption can be explained as follows:<sup>16</sup> if Athena moves through the right *eisodos*, as it has been previously suggested, forward to approach Odysseus who is perhaps close to the main door of the hut,<sup>17</sup> then she may have stopped in a position on the stage where she keeps an equal distance from Odysseus while she engages in a conversation with him, and similarly from Ajax when she calls him outside the hut. It is not necessary to adhere to the image of a goddess who remains immobile, but we should be thinking of a goddess who gets in an earthly involvement with whatever is happening in the acting area with the mortals.<sup>18</sup> It is then possible that Athena takes her position in the orchestra as soon as Odysseus stops in front of Ajax's hut to look into the door (v. 11) and, in lines 36-37, she describes how she led her steps close to Odysseus as a guardian to her protégé. As it is noted by Gasti, Athena's eyes are constantly focused on the object of her vision («σε») which is referred to Odysseus as if she wanted to underscore the intimate relationship with her protectant.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the verbs «δέδορκα - ὀρῶ», firstly uttered at her entrance, focus on the importance of Athena's vision which functions as a pointer for the spectators' eyes to recognize the characters who open the play and locate them in the theatrical space.

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(p. 85-115) p. 89, translates Ajax v. 35-6 «came on the path» and takes for granted that Athena is on the ground following Odysseus' steps.

<sup>15</sup> Translation of the text as it follows is by Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*.

<sup>16</sup> Stanford, *Ajax* on v. 15, also argues that Odysseus becomes able to see Athena by moving in her direction. But it is rather uncertain whether Odysseus is able to see Athena at all.

<sup>17</sup> Calder, «The Entrance of Athena», p. 115: «- if he [Odysseus] is close to the scaenae frons».

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also James T. Allen, «Greek Acting in the Fifth Century», *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* (1916), p. 279-289, who presumed that divinities, together with the other figures in the plays, were not presented in a superhuman stature or a statuesque manner.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Gasti, «Σοφοκλέους Αἴας: Η τραγωδία της ὁράσης», *Δωδώνη* 27 (1998), p. 171-172.

Besides, if we assume that Athena is on the ground, we may consider her invisibility by contrast to the words of clear «hearing» («φθέγμα», v. 14, «φώνημ' ἀκούω», v. 16) which signal the fact that her voice immediately becomes the significant point of recognition by Odysseus.<sup>20</sup> As such, the goddess demonstrates herself before Odysseus primarily as a vocal embodiment than as a physical vision: «ὦ φθέγμ' Ἀθάνας, φυλτάτης ἐμοὶ θεῶν, / ὥς εὐμαθὲς σου, κἂν ἄποπτος ᾗς ὅμως» («how easily, even though you are invisible, do I hear your voice», v. 14-15).<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the scholium on v. 14 provides an interpretation of «φθέγμα» and «ἄποπτος» that pertains to the spectacle in the prologue:

Φθέγμα γὰρ εἶπεν ὥς μὴ θεασάμενος αὐτήν· δῆλον γὰρ ὥς οὐκ εἶδεν αὐτήν ἐκ τοῦ· κἂν ἄποπτος ᾗς, ὅμως, τουτέστιν ἀόρατος. τῆς δὲ φωνῆς μόνῃς αἰσθάνεται ὥς ἐθάδος αὐτῷ οὔσης. ἔστι μέντοι ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς ἡ Ἀθηνᾶ· δεῖ γὰρ τοῦτο χαρίζεσθαι τοῖς θεαταῖς.<sup>22</sup>

The ancient scholiast emphasizes the effect of the divine voice appealing to the audience's awareness of Athena's invisibility when she was never clearly seen in her encounters with the mortals, presumably in the epic tradition.<sup>23</sup> And he continues that the goddess is standing «on the scene» because her appearance is due to arouse the pleasure of the audience. At this point, Marinelli maintains that the words «ἐπὶ σκηνῆς» of the scholium mean that Athena appears on top of the stage building, so Odysseus who is standing in the orchestra cannot see her as he is caught with surprise to hear her voice. In consequence, the spectacle is also aimed at exciting the interest and the astonishment of the spectators but also, in a deeper level, to induct them in the experience of complex emotions right at the outset of the play.<sup>24</sup>

As to the meaning of «κἂν ἄποπτος ᾗς ὅμως» (v. 15), we are provided with the following interpretations: Athena (i) «seen from afar» or (ii) «unseen» also on a par with the dim light of daybreak, or (iii) «even when she is not visible - unlike the present occasion».<sup>25</sup> Garvie agrees with Buxton against the view that «ἄποπτος»

<sup>20</sup> In the *Iliad* 2.182 and 10.512, Odysseus also «infers Athena's presence from her voice», so Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*, on v. 14-17, p. 141.

<sup>21</sup> Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*, on v.15-17, p. 142.

<sup>22</sup> George A. Christodoulou, *Scholia on the Ajax*, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens – School of Philosophy, Athens 1977, p. 17, on v. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Stanford also proposes *Iliad* 10.275-6, and 507-512 for Athena's invisibility in the epic and comments on v. 15, p. 56: «Sophocles may have had the night scene in *Iliad* 10 in mind», and the subjunctive ᾗς after κἂν «suggests that there were previous occasions when Athena directed Odysseus' actions without being clearly seen».

<sup>24</sup> Manlio Marinelli, «Un' Analisi Performativa della Prima Sequenza dell' *Aiace* di Sofocle», *Maia* 72/1 (2020), p. 57-58 and n. 43.

<sup>25</sup> Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, p. 116, n. 1: «The point is, rather, that he who knows her voice



here means simply «seen from afar» or «dimly seen»<sup>26</sup> while, to the contrary, Taplin argues that Athena's invisibility during the prologue of Ajax «would be inconvenient and pointless».<sup>27</sup> In addition, Stanford points out that the phrasing of «κἄν ἄποπτος ᾗς ὄμως» would symbolize that Sophocles «intends the ambiguity between the dimness of the light and the state of uncertainty in the mind of Odysseus».<sup>28</sup> I would rather exclude the case suggested by Taplin that Athena is visible in the prologue on grounds that we need to keep up the impact of the successive stages of invisibility, which are inflicted upon Odysseus and Ajax by the goddess and therefore share the contrast of different states of mind between the two heroes. For this purpose, it is more convenient to suppose that Athena, though invisible, stays in close verbal interaction with the two other persons at the same level while Sophocles creates a scene with all three actors on stage speaking in successive duologues: Athena with Odysseus, Athena with Ajax. Either of the other two solutions (i) or (ii) seems to be possible, though I would put a strong preference on the "unseen" option for Athena's invisibility onstage.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the fact that Athena is pronounced to be invisible to Odysseus does not imply that the audience cannot see her.<sup>30</sup>

I would therefore agree with the opinion that Athena is on the ground when she converses with Odysseus and Ajax. Divine activities are not by all means confined to the upper level in the Greek theatre.<sup>31</sup> A number of Euripidean plays open with

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so well recognizes her without even looking for her».

<sup>26</sup> Garvie on v. 14-16, p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, p. 366, n. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Stanford, Ajax, on v. 15; cf. v. 33 for Odysseus' confused state of mind: «ἐκπέπληγμαι» («thrown off course, off the trail» Finglass, Sophocles' Ajax, on v. 33, p. 146).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Finglass, Sophocles' Ajax, p.137: «But her invisibility is appropriate in a scene where the gap between mortal and immortal vision looms large»; cf. also Gasti «Σοφοκλέους Αἴας: Η τραγωδία της ὄρασης», p. 74, n. 3, saying that «commentators tend to agree that Athena is not visible to Odysseus»; contra Daria Bertolaso, «L' espace dévoilé et la honte du héros: problèmes de visibilité scénique dans l' *Ajax* de Sophocle», *Museum Helveticum* 67 (2010), p. 79, 81 and n. 42, who thinks that Athena's invisibility should be envisaged only for the first part of the prologue and then she becomes slowly visible to Odysseus as long as they communicate with an agitated dialogue (v. 38-50 and 74-88).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles*, p. 176, n. 3: «The fact that Odysseus claims not to see her is no reason to suppose that she is concealed or partially concealed from the audience»; Siegfried Melchinger, *Das Theater der Tragödie: Aischylos, Sophokles und Euripides auf der Bühne ihrer Zeit*, München 1974. p. 197.

<sup>31</sup> Pietro Pucci, «Gods' Intervention and Epiphany in Sophocles», Gregory Nagy (ed.), *Greek Literature in the Classical Period: The Poetics of Drama in Athens*, Routledge, London 2001, p. 113-144; see also Peter Burian, «The Play before the Prologue: Initial Tableaux on the Greek Stage», *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honour of G. F. Else*, University of Michigan Press 1977 (p. 79-94) p. 86, n. 19 for prologue-gods on stage. For the distinction between prologue-gods and epilogue-gods, see N.C. Hourmouziades, *Production and Imagination in Euripides*, Greek Society for Humanistic Studies, Greek

gods speaking on stage. Apollo and Thanatos in *Alcestis* (v. 1-76),<sup>32</sup> Hermes in *Ion* (v. 1-81),<sup>33</sup> possibly Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* (v. 1-57),<sup>34</sup> Poseidon and Athena in *Troades* (v. 1-97),<sup>35</sup> Dionysus in *Bacchae* (v. 1-63).<sup>36</sup> The difference with the prologue of *Ajax* is that deities in Euripides' prologues do not initiate dialogue-contact with mortals,<sup>37</sup> and they disappear before the parodos-song and the arrival of human characters. On the contrary, Athena in *Ajax* keeps close interaction with the two mortals and possesses the power to master skillfully their sight. Odysseus admits that «a god can do anything» («γένοιτο μέντ' ἅν θεοῦ τεχνωμένου», v. 86)<sup>38</sup> and this means that a god has the knowledge to devise things that a mortal could never do. She totally controls the sight both of Odysseus and of Ajax: she can conceal herself from view if she wishes and she can also conceal Odysseus from view so that he can stand by as a silent witness of Ajax's madness in order to publicize it to the Achaeans at a later stage. In this case, the importance of her τέχνη would have been diminished had Athena been stuck in an immovable position on the roof. The point I suggest is that «the demarcation of a separate space» for Athena on high, as Mastronarde proposes,<sup>39</sup> would not succeed in visualizing the compelling effect of a goddess who intermingles with mortals in a powerful scheme of contrasted activities. It is better to contrive that as she moves around on the same level with her interlocutors, the triangular effect of dialogue is strongly pointed out in the presence of three speakers on stage than to think of a three-actor dialogue with a divinity standing immobile on the roof level. In this sense, Athena is being down on the stage and entails the

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Society for Humanistic Studies, Athens 1965, p. 156 ff. The term *deus ex machina* corresponds to the sudden and unexpected appearance of a deity at the end of a play. This applies to the Euripidean epiphanies and also to the epiphany in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

<sup>32</sup> See Stavros Tsitsiridis, «Η σκηνή του Ευριπίδη», *Logeion. A Journal of Ancient Theatre* 9 (2019), p. 131, for the existence of a porch in front of the main door where Poseidon is probably standing while he addresses Thanatos in the prologue of Euripides' *Alcestis*; cf. Euripides' *Alcestis* v. 29: «πρὸς μελάθροις» and v. 101: «ἐπὶ προθύροις».

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, for Hermes' exit from a side entrance in Euripides' *Ion* (p. 155 and n. 78).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* for Aphrodite who appears as «prologue speaker» in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The goddess departs as a mortal appears on stage (p. 138); cf. William S. Barrett, «Euripides *Hippolytos*», Oxford Clarendon Press 1978, (1964) on v. 51-3, p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> Tsitsiridis, «Η σκηνή του Ευριπίδη», p. 152 and n. 77.

<sup>36</sup> Helen Gasti, «Ερμηνευτικά στερεότυπα στον Ευριπίδη: Τροπές και ανατροπές στις *Βάκχες*», *Logeion, A Journal of Ancient Theatre* 7 (2017), p. 224-225 and ns. 26, 27, argues that Euripides presents a theatrical paradox with the human appearance of Dionysus in the prologue of the *Bacchae* that has no parallel in his extant tragedies.

<sup>37</sup> Dionysos in the *Bacchae* differs from other divinities in Euripides' prologues not only because he appears in human form, but he also intermingles with the actors in the play; see E.R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae*, Oxford Clarendon Press, Oxford 1960 (1944) p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Buxton, «Blindness and Limits» on v. 86, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Mastronarde, «Actors on High», p. 280.

embodiment of a stage-director who suggests to the audience what to see, what to take as invisible and what to visualize in order to be prepared to view an actor playing a madman.<sup>40</sup> Hence, when Ajax emerges from the hut (v. 91), his address to the goddess is so direct and familiar that it leaves no time for a pause while turning his eyes to face her on the *theologeion* where she could be allegedly standing.<sup>41</sup>

### The invisible Odysseus: Ajax's lack of vision

As I have tried to suggest, the first set of the dialogue between Athena and Odysseus is permeated with the uncertainty of vision which seems to cause problems for our understanding of the staging of the scene, but without functioning as an impediment in the sequence of an intense dialogue between the goddess and the mortal. In fact, the encounter between Athena and Ajax splits into two parts the stream of the dialogue between her and Odysseus, which is to be terminated in lines 118-133. In the following section of this essay, I will turn my attention to the invisibility of Odysseus which is imposed by Athena at the entrance of Ajax.

The insistence on invisibility is so prominent in the play that we have a clear depiction of how it works against Ajax, but we are left with gaps to account how it works for Odysseus when he faces Athena. Instead, the text notifies us clearly that Athena had interfered with Ajax's sight so that he had mistaken animals for men and slaughtered them in his rage to punish the Achaeans.<sup>42</sup> This is the information that

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<sup>40</sup> See Charles P. Segal, «Drama, Narrative and Perspective in *Ajax*», *Sacris Erudiri* 31 (1989-1990), p. 397-398, in his remarkable notes on «the illusionistic process itself, i.e. the paradoxical complex of Athena making herself visible and making Odysseus invisible to their common 'spectator' [Ajax]», though, he also claims that «Athena looks down all-knowingly from on high»; see also Easterling, «Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy», p. 80-83, where she elaborates the idea of Athena in the role of *didaskalos* for gods who «are usually brought on stage to do a job like that of the dramatist himself»; cf. Costas Valakas, «The Use of the Body by Actors in Tragedy and Satyr-play», Patricia E. Easterling – Edith Hall (eds), *Greek and Roman Actors. Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, (p. 69-92) p. 73, who emphasizes the interdependence of Athena, Odysseus and Ajax in the scene and hints at the metatheatrical interpretation of the actors' bodily movement in the staging of the prologue.

<sup>41</sup> Though Calder, «The Entrance of Athena», p. 115, reaches the opposite conclusion following the same path: «Ajax emerges from the hut, partially turns, and looks toward the roof, not Odysseus, who stands in the orchestra». And he continues that «if Athena is on the ground and Odysseus "fairly close to her", the effect could only be absurd or magical if Ajax looked straight at Athena and Odysseus and saw only Athena»; cf. Taplin's, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, p. 116, n. 1, persuasive suggestion that «characters in a play see what the playwright has them see, regardless of the realities of "topics"».

<sup>42</sup> Bernard M. W. Knox, «The *Ajax* of Sophocles», *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961), p. 5: «the madness affects his vision more than his mind»; Karl Reinhardt, *Sophocles* (tr. Hazel Harvey and David Harvey), Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1979, p. 236, n. 5: «in Sophocles the madness only begins with that veiling of the senses by which the goddess protects the Greeks». Further for Ajax's murder of

the goddess passes on to Odysseus, thus providing further evidence of her divine τέχνη (v. 51-65). The text abounds with references to Ajax's distorted vision and the consequences of his fury against the Greek army. Athena declares that she will make manifest the madness of Ajax in front of Odysseus' eyes so she can tell to all the Argives: «δείξω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τήνδε περιφανῆ νόσον/ὥς πᾶσιν Ἀργείοισιν εἰσιδὼν θροῆς» («I shall show you too this madness in full view, so that you may see and proclaim it to all the Argives», v. 66-67). She reassures Odysseus that she would divert Ajax's sight, so he does not see his face (v. 69-70) thus demonstrating once again her superiority in commanding vision.<sup>43</sup> Gasti argues that the display of Ajax's sickness («περιφανῆ νόσον») is «a visual experience» which is reflected as a vivid spectacle on Odysseus and the spectators. She continues that the impact of the demented Ajax is such a devastating vision that terrifies Odysseus to overtly face it. Odysseus' fear and uneasiness are alluded in Athena's question: «μεμνηότα ἄνδρα περιφανῶς ὀκνεῖς ἰδεῖν;» («Are you afraid to see a man manifestly mad?», v. 81)<sup>44</sup> which is replied by Odysseus with the assertion that if Ajax were sane he would not shrink in fear (v. 82) The madness of Ajax is then revealed and deployed as a visual distortion of reality prompted by the superior power of Athena.<sup>45</sup> It seems that what matters here is Ajax's lack of vision, and the progress from invisibility to visibility for Odysseus' sight of Athena becomes a subordinate subject and is not mentioned ever again.

As Athena summons Ajax for a second time to come out (v. 71-73), Odysseus might have stepped aside from the entrance of the hut by his fear of facing the enemy. Though we can tell little about Odysseus' stage movements at this moment, it

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animals as a form of ritual and sacrifice, see William Blake Tyrell, «The Unity of Sophocles' *Ajax*», *Arethusa* 18 (1985), p. 155-185.

<sup>43</sup> During the encounter between Athena and Ajax, another demonstration of the divine power to interfere with sight is when Tecmessa, who remains inside the hut during the conversation, misconceives the goddess as a shadow (v. 301); see Jebb *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments* on v.15 and Calder, «The Entrance of Athena», p. 115. Tecmessa also «saw» Athena, and she gives her own perception of this vision, that is, «some shadow» to which Ajax shouted; cf. v. 243-244 and Easterling's remark, «Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy», p. 83: «A 'daimon': does she mean Athena?»

<sup>44</sup> I follow Finglass' translation of v.81, who relates the adverb «περιφανῶς» rather with the participle «μεμνηότα» than with the infinitive «ἰδεῖν»; cf. v.228 by the Chorus for Ajax: «περίφαντος ἀνὴρ»; contra Gasti «Σοφοκλέους Αἴας: Ἡ τραγωδία τῆς ὁράσεως», p. 182, who opts for «περιφανῶς ἰδεῖν» with emphasis to the unmediated spectacle of Ajax's madness.

<sup>45</sup> Mastronarde, «Actors on High», p. 274, seems to imply that Ajax can see Athena in his distorted mind, but Odysseus' inability to see her is due to his normal mortal status. But the text is very clear to indicate that it is within Athena's masterly art to control who sees and who does not; cf. Gasti «Σοφοκλέους Αἴας: Ἡ τραγωδία τῆς ὁράσεως», p.180 and n.4 on the epithet «γοργῶπις» (v. 450) for Athena's power to interfere with vision; Pucci, «Gods' Intervention and Epiphany in Sophocles», p. 23 and n. 16: «The audience, therefore, cannot decide whether [Ajax] sees Athena, or believes that he sees Athena, or whether it is at all important what he sees, since all his senses are distorted».

would be more likely to imagine that he might attempt an exit between lines 66-75 inasmuch as Athena tries to hold him back with the command «θαρσῶν δὲ μῖμνε μηδὲ συμφορὰν δέχου/τὸν ἄνδρα» («Take courage and await the man», v. 68-69) in which himself strongly responds with the instruction: «μηδαμῶς σφ' ἔξω κάλει» («Don't continue calling him outside», v. 74). On the other side, this allegedly attempted exit would be an extra action that «would have to be acted out simultaneously with words that say nothing about it».<sup>46</sup> However, in a theatrical production, a stage director is likely to bring out gestures and movements which are undetectable in the script, while the reader is free to imagine acting possibilities associated with the words of the text.<sup>47</sup>

While Athena has no difficulty commanding vision, her power, however, rests outside the realm of silence. Twice in the text (v. 75, 87) her commands for silence indicate that she is unable to inflict speechlessness upon Odysseus because it is his own responsibility to remain silent while she converses with Ajax. First, Athena urges him to stay quiet and to guard against cowardice: «οὐ σῖγ' ἀνέξῃ μηδὲ δειλίαν ἀρῇ;» («Won't you keep quiet, and not incur cowardice?», v. 75). And she continues that Ajax will not see that Odysseus is nearby, («ἀλλ' οὐδὲ νῦν σε μὴ παρόντ' ἴδῃ πέλας, v. 83) because she will darken Ajax's eyes though they see («ἐγὼ σκοτώσω βλέφαρα καὶ δεδορκότα», v. 85). Finally, she makes her order to Odysseus for silence more explicit in order to witness safely the madness of Ajax:<sup>48</sup> «σίγα νυν ἐστὼς καὶ μὲν' ὥς κυρεῖς ἔχων» («Then stand in silence and remain as you are», v. 87). This incident seems to bear similarities to Orestes' commands for silence in Sophocles' *Electra*, when Electra explodes in joyful cries for the recognition of her brother (v. 1232-1232). Orestes tries repeatedly to refrain her from an exaggerated reaction of happiness and joy so he orders her to be quiet and silent because his plan of revenge prevails over the out-pouring of her emotions at that moment.<sup>49</sup> In the prologue of *Ajax*, the difference from *Electra*'s scene is that a similar command for quietness and silence is replicated by the goddess who tries to forestall Odysseus' outburst of fear and dismay as the demented Ajax is about to emerge from his hut. By shifting his

<sup>46</sup> Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action*, Methuen, London 1978, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> See Graham Ley, «Performance Studies and Greek Tragedy», *Eranos* 92 (1994), p. 29-45.

<sup>48</sup> William M. Calder III, «The Sophoclean Apologia: *Philoctetes*», *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 4 (1971), p. 165, suggests that this is a comic device which is repeated in Odysseus' eavesdropping in *Philoctetes* v. 1258 ff., where he believes that Odysseus does not exit in v. 1258, but he remains to deceive Philoctetes with another trick together with Neoptolemus.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Orestes' commands to Electra: «σῖγ' ἔχουσα πρόσμενε» (v. 1236), «σιγαῖν ἄμεινον, μὴ τις ἔνδοθεν κλύῃ» (v. 1238) and, later, Electra's order to the Chorus for silence «ἀλλὰ σίγα πρόσμενε» (v. 1399), while Clytaemnestra is being executed inside the palace; see J. H. Kells, *Sophocles' Electra*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987 (1973), p. 198-199.



position into a speechless actor in the background of the scene,<sup>50</sup> Odysseus becomes the silent spectator of the encounter between Athena and Ajax and the baffled hearer of new information that he was impatiently seeking in his hunting steps when he entered the stage. Apparently, Odysseus' silent presence is the main reason which sustains his disappearance from Ajax's view. Ajax's hallucination that Odysseus is his prisoner inside the tent would have been destroyed had Odysseus dared to break his silence outside the tent.

It has been explained that while attending the exchanges between Athena and Ajax, Odysseus in his silent position is made 'an audience-within-the play'<sup>51</sup> who accepts to see Ajax's disturbing spectacle without still knowing how he will use this revelatory vision in the course of the play.<sup>52</sup> Subsequently, the real audience attend a theatrical piece in which they have to identify with Odysseus who remains a silent spectator like them, in order to calmly face the entrance of the deluded hero and experience the fear that Ajax spreads in his intense dialogue with the goddess. What is of interest here is that the opening scene amounts to the reconstruction of Odysseus' knowledge of the last night's dreadful events and, moreover, builds up to an intricate stage action with the three actors that gives prominence to theatrical devices such as invisibility vs vision and silence vs speech.

My point is that speech between Odysseus and the goddess can run normally in the prologue even if we surmise that the divine agency renders one of the persons invisible to the other interlocutor, a device which has been only here contrived in the extant tragedies of Sophocles. But the dialogue becomes obviously modified when one of the persons is pushed into a silent role, and it seems that this is above all what makes Odysseus unapproachable to Ajax. Thus, by keeping a speechless position motivated by means of invisibility, the third actor is not only excluded from the dialogue of the two other actors, but he is also secretly watching the ironical play of words between them. In terms of dramatic performance, we may explain the shaping of the scene as a masterly coup-de-theatre that produces the splitting of the dialogue in two parts at the entrance of the third actor and transforms the setting of the

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<sup>50</sup> Garvie, *Sophocles Ajax*, p. 132, on v. 88 thinks that «Odysseus probably withdraws to the end of the stage where he is invisible to Ajax»; Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*, on v. 88 contradicts that after a long stichomythia with Athena «his withdrawal would only confuse», p. 163.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Ringer, «The Staging of a Hero» in *Electra and the Empty Urn. Metatheater and Role Playing in Sophocles*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1998, p. 31-49.

<sup>52</sup> For the motif of 'knowing' and 'learning' in the prologue of *Ajax*, see Severin Hof, «Resonance in the Prologue of Sophocles' Ajax», Gunther Martiv – Federica Iurescia – Severin Hof – Giada Sorrentino (eds), *Pragmatic Approaches to Drama. Studies in Communication on the Ancient Stage*, Brill 2021 (p. 121-139) p. 125-126; cf. Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*, p. 38, for Ajax's attempted attack on the Greeks, if this is a Sophoclean innovation: «the audience would be as surprised as Odysseus when he learns of this (v. 44-50)».



prologue from a two-actor into a three-actor scene, where one of the actors utters no word because he is concealed in divine invisibility.

In the following scene (v. 91-117), Odysseus, while staying in his invisible position, listens to Ajax abusing him because he was not awarded Achilles' arms, and he witnesses his rage to take vengeance on his adversary with death by torture. The element of irony is enhanced with Odysseus being visible for the spectators but invisible for the deluded Ajax who is confident that he seized Odysseus and keeps him a prisoner tied inside his hut. Athena's omnipotent status emphasizes the ironical undertones of the scene when she is pretending to show familiarity with Ajax and beg him not to torture the wretched man (v. 111).<sup>53</sup> Albeit the two men, Ajax and Odysseus, stand very close on stage, the dramatist does not allow any sort of communication between them by virtue of invisibility governed by Athena's divine craft.<sup>54</sup> Odysseus' invisibility is further pointed out not only because he is committed to speechlessness but also because Athena makes him the object of the discussion in the conversation with Ajax (v. 101-102), who responds with vehement attacks against his enemy (cf. v. 103 ff.). The exchanges between Athena and Ajax must have made a strong impact upon Odysseus when he breaks his silence and is summoned by the goddess to reenter into the dialogue. I would suggest that Athena's first word «ὀρᾶς» to Odysseus at v. 118 not only signifies that «the visible display of divine power is over»,<sup>55</sup> but also that this is a sign that Odysseus can emerge from his silent witnessing and assume speech as soon as Ajax makes his exit (v. 117).<sup>56</sup> His last words are pity for Ajax and thoughts about the fate of the mortals, but he says nothing about how he is going to use the knowledge he has gained in the light of the recent events.<sup>57</sup> Athena and Odysseus leave presumably via the same side they entered, that is on the spectators' right (v. 133).<sup>58</sup> The orchestra becomes empty for a while and then the Chorus of the Salaminian sailors sing the anapaests of the

<sup>53</sup> For Athena's «merciless» attitude in the prologue, see Knox, «The *Ajax* of Sophocles», p. 6-8; cf. Martin Revermann, «Divinity on the Classical Greek Stage: Proposing a New Model», S. Douglas Olson – Oliver Taplin – Piero Totaro, *Page and Stage. Intersections of Text and Performance in Ancient Greek Drama*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023, (p. 45-63), p. 56-57: «The deity is shown an agent of power instead of being seen an object of worship».

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Seale, *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles*, p. 149: «they occupy separate worlds of existence».

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>56</sup> Ivan M. Linforth, «Three Scenes in Sophocles' *Ajax*», *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15/5 (1954), p. 4: «After Ajax has disappeared, there is a moment of silence. Odysseus is overcome by what he has seen and heard»; consider also Jon Hesk, *Ajax*, Duckworth Companion to Greek and Latin Tragedy 2003, p. 42-43, who thinks that «throughout this exchange, we can imagine Odysseus performing some expressive body language».

<sup>57</sup> Cf. v. 66-67 and n. 52 above.

<sup>58</sup> So Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax*, p.175; contra Heath & O'Kell, p. 5, who favor Odysseus' exit to the camp and Athena's exit to the wood; cf. ns.1 and 4, above.

parodos-song.

## Conclusion

In the preceding analysis, I have tried to focus on the staging issues in the context of the prologue in the *Ajax* of Sophocles. I have shown how the theatrical device of invisibility has been contrived by Sophocles in the three-way encounter between the actors who represent Athena, Odysseus and Ajax. Athena's appearance has been explained as operating on the ground and in close interaction with Odysseus and Ajax that emphasizes her earthly involvement with the mortals. Athena holds the capacity to distort the vision of the mortals and repress their predisposition to speak.<sup>59</sup> The easiness with which she commands the vision of Ajax has been rendered as a principal stage action that calls to the audience what to see and what to acknowledge to be unseen. As such, Athena's presence conjures up a metatheatrical enactment of her divine role in the opening scene. She is thus taking over the role of a stage manager who transmutes a speaking actor (Odysseus) into an onstage spectator hidden from view and deliberately bound to silence in order to avoid the confrontation with another speaking actor, that is Ajax.<sup>60</sup> In this regard, Odysseus develops into an inner audience in the theatre who is dependent on Athena's stage-directions to control his vision or his invisibility while, at the same time, he is acting as an exemplar for the spectators' focus on the play.<sup>61</sup> His appearances in the beginning and the end of the play (1318 ff.) direct the perception of the audience to discover new attitudes for Ajax's rehabilitation from a disgraceful madman to an honored dead hero. By means of this, the evolution of his thought after Ajax's death, when he argues with Agamemnon in favor of the burial of Ajax, is attuned to his mood in the prologue where he shows pity and fear in front of Ajax.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Pucci, «Gods' Intervention and Epiphany in Sophocles», p. 20-21, notices the difference between Athena's invisibility in the *Iliad* and in *Ajax*. In the *Iliad*, «Athena's limited self-revelation to Odysseus plays off against her full revelation to Achilles in the first book, implying a series of comparisons between the two heroes. [...] In *Ajax* the goddess does not come to Odysseus to give him advice. [...] She comes down to show Odysseus how she saved the Greeks from Ajax' fury, how she made and makes of him a pitiful plaything: she wants this to be known by the Greeks».

<sup>60</sup> Gregory W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play. Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics*, Oxford University Press 2001 (p. 57-69) p. 59: «The complex three-way interaction in which Athena presents Aias to Odysseus as Sophocles presents all three to the spectators is unique to the introductory sequence».

<sup>61</sup> See Simon Goldhill, «The audience on stage: rhetoric, emotion, and judgment in Sophoclean theatre», Simon Goldhill – Edith Hall (eds), *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, (p. 27-47) p. 30-31: «Odysseus acts as a focalizer for the audience in the theatre», but he is also «a critical observer [...] who takes his own view of what has happened».

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Linforth, «Three Scenes in Sophocles' *Ajax*», p. 9: «He is in exactly the mood which will lead him

This sort of introductory scene of the play bears an intriguing theatrical innovation that aims to capture the audience at once in the dramatic situation and, at the same time, to create suspense for the looming spectacle of Ajax. The innovation of Sophocles to bring forth the interplay between the seen and the unseen intertwined with silence expands the intricacies of performance between the three actors on stage. As Charles Segal noticed, behind the complexity of the scene emerges «Sophocles' own craft» who stages a repeating structure of acting in a scheme of A (Athena and Odysseus) – B (Athena and Ajax) – A (Athena and Odysseus) process that sets in motion the performance of shared emotions between the actors and the audience with the perspective that these emotions would be restored with Ajax's funeral at the end of the play.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, this sort of theatrical interplay signifies that the spectators are prompted to contemplate that Sophocles' own stage management is subsumed under the directions which are orchestrated by the actor playing Athena. In this sense, the theatrical device of invisibility has become the prominent vehicle of the playwright to disclose the three actors in a strikingly paradox way of acting in the Greek theatre, that is to pretend not to be there as players in full view and, occasionally, not to be able as speakers to utter a word.<sup>64</sup>



at the end of the play, after Ajax's death, to offer Agamemnon the counsel that he does offer», i.e. to bury Ajax.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Segal, «Tragic Beginnings: narration, voice and authority in the prologues of Greek drama», Francis Dunn – Thomas Cole (eds), *Beginnings in Classical Literature*, Yale Classical Studies, vol. xxix, Cambridge University Press 1992 (p. 85-112), p. 100-101 and 110.

<sup>64</sup> In the words of Charles Segal, «Drama and Perspective in *Ajax*», *Sophocles' Tragic World. Divinity, Nature, Society*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge/Mass 1995, p. 19: «a condensation of the power of mimetic illusion».

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

**ΑΟΡΑΤΟΙ ΗΘΟΠΟΙΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΑΡΧΑΙΟ ΘΕΑΤΡΟ:  
ΣΚΗΝΟΘΕΤΩΝΤΑΣ ΤΟΝ ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟ ΣΤΟΝ ΑΙΑΝΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΣΟΦΟΚΛΗ**

Στον πρόλογο της τραγωδίας *Αίας* του Σοφοκλή εμφανίζονται οι τρεις υποκριτές υποδύομενοι τους ρόλους του Οδυσσέα, της Αθηνάς και του Αίαντα. Η σκηνή παρουσιάζει ιδιαίτερο δραματικό ενδιαφέρον, γιατί ο Σοφοκλής επινοεί ένα σκηνοθετικό εύρημα καθιστώντας την Αθηνά αόρατη μπροστά στον Οδυσσέα και, στην συνέχεια, τον Οδυσσέα αόρατο μπροστά στα μάτια του Αίαντα. Οι τρεις υποκριτές αλληλοεπιδρούν σε ζεύγη διαλόγων πρώτα ανάμεσα στην υποτιθέμενα αόρατη Αθηνά και τον Οδυσσέα, και ύστερα ανάμεσα στην Αθηνά και τον Αίαντα με τον Οδυσσέα να παρακολουθεί ως σιωπηλός και αφανής ακροατής την συνομιλία των δύο προσώπων στην σκηνή. Στόχος της παρούσας εργασίας είναι πρώτον να συμβάλει στην συζήτηση για την σκηνική παρουσίαση της αόρατης Αθηνάς στον πρόλογο του έργου, η οποία εγείρει το θεατρικό ζήτημα σχετικά με την εμφάνισή της στο *θεολογεῖον* και δεύτερον, να διερευνήσει την σκηνική παρουσίαση του αόρατου Οδυσσέα, η οποία συνδυάζεται με την σιωπή την οποία οφείλει να τηρήσει κατά προτροπή της Αθηνάς για να μην γίνει αντιληπτός από τον μαινόμενο Αίαντα. Αντίθετα, οι θεατές παρακολουθούν τους υποκριτές να υποδύονται αόρατα πρόσωπα στις μεταξύ τους συναντήσεις και καλούνται να εστιάσουν την προσοχή τους στις υποδείξεις του κειμένου για να κατανοήσουν τις καινοτομίες σίτην σκηνική εκδοχή του Σοφοκλή για τον μύθο του Αίαντα, τον οποίο γνωρίζουν από την ομηρική παράδοση.



## ABSTRACT

**INVISIBLE ACTORS IN THE GREEK THEATRE:  
STAGING THE PROLOGUE OF SOPHOCLES' *AJAX***

In the prologue of Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*, three actors appear, playing the roles of Odysseus, Athena, and Ajax. The scene presents a particular dramatic interest because Sophocles devises a directorial device by making Athena invisible to Odysseus and, subsequently, Odysseus invisible to Ajax's eyes. The three actors interact in pairs of dialogues: first, between the supposedly invisible Athena and Odysseus, and then between Athena and Ajax, with Odysseus watching as a silent and unseen listener to the conversation of the two characters on stage. The aim of the present study is, firstly, to contribute to the discussion on the staging of the invisible Athena in the play's prologue, which raises the theatrical issue concerning her appearance on the *theologeion* (the roof or raised platform for gods), and

secondly, to investigate the staging of the invisible Odysseus, which is combined with the silence he must observe at Athena's prompting to avoid being perceived by the raging Ajax. Conversely, the spectators watch the actors playing invisible characters in their encounters and are called upon to focus their attention on the text's indications to understand the innovations in Sophocles' stage version of the myth of Ajax, which they know from the Homeric tradition.



### Η ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΑΣ

Η Αυγή-Άννα Μάγγελ είναι Σύμβουλος Κλασικών Σπουδών στο Υπουργείο Παιδείας της Ελλάδας. Είναι απόφοιτος του Τμήματος Φιλολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών. Ολοκλήρωσε τις μεταπτυχιακές της σπουδές (M.A. και PhD) στον Κλασικό Πολιτισμό και το Αρχαίο Ελληνικό Δράμα στο University College London (UCL), υπό την επίβλεψη του Καθηγητή Eric W. Handley και της Καθηγήτριας Pat E. Easterling. Υπήρξε επισκέπτρια ερευνήτρια: 1) Στο Πανεπιστήμιο Princeton, Τμήμα Κλασικών Σπουδών, N.J. ΗΠΑ, όπου διεξήγαγε έρευνα στη Θεωρία του Δράματος και την Ελληνική Τραγωδία με την υποστήριξη της Καθηγήτριας Froma Zeitlin (1993). 2) Στο Πανεπιστήμιο του Cambridge, Τμήμα Κλασικών Σπουδών (1994-1995). Είναι κάτοχος υποτροφίας στο Ινστιτούτο Κλασικών Σπουδών (Institute of Classical Studies) και στην Ελληνική Εταιρεία (Hellenic Society), University of London (1991-1998). Κατά τη διάρκεια των μεταπτυχιακών της σπουδών, δίδαξε Νέα Ελληνικά στο Πρόγραμμα Tripos του Πανεπιστημίου του Cambridge, σε συνεργασία με τον Dr. David Holton. Κατά το ακαδημαϊκό έτος 1997-1998, δίδαξε το Μεταπτυχιακό Σεμινάριο για το Αρχαίο Ελληνικό Δράμα και διετέλεσε μέλος της Επιστημονικής Επιτροπής του Προγράμματος Μεταπτυχιακών Σπουδών στο Τμήμα Θεατρικών Σπουδών του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών. Υπηρέτησε ως Σύμβουλος Κλασικών Σπουδών στο Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο για την εφαρμογή και τον συντονισμό του εθνικού αναλυτικού προγράμματος στο πλαίσιο της ανθρωπιστικής εκπαίδευσης στη δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευση (2008-2012). Από το 2000, διδάσκει διάφορα αρχαιογνωστικά αντικείμενα και το Αρχαίο Ελληνικό Θέατρο στα Πανεπιστήμια Αθηνών, Πατρών και Πελοποννήσου ως Συνεργαζόμενο Διδακτικό Προσωπικό. Από το 2002, έχει οριστεί από το Ελληνικό Ανοικτό Πανεπιστήμιο (ΕΑΠ) να διδάσκει Αρχαία Ελληνική Γραμματεία και Ελληνικό Θέατρο στο προπτυχιακό πρόγραμμα «Σπουδές στον Ελληνικό Πολιτισμό», χρησιμοποιώντας μεθόδους ηλεκτρονικής μάθησης (*e-learning*), διαδικτυακές πλατφόρμες και τις βασικές αρχές της εξ αποστάσεως εκπαίδευσης. Έχει εκτενές δημοσιευμένο έργο στην Αρχαία Ελληνική Γραμματεία και Γλώσσα, το Αρχαίο Ελληνικό Δράμα, την Ελληνική Λυρική Ποίηση, τη Λογοτεχνική Πρόσληψη του Κλασικού Πολιτισμού (*Classical Reception*) και τη Λογοτεχνική Μετάφραση από Αγγλικά και Γαλλικά. Εργάζεται σε ερευνητικό πρόγραμμα για τις Κλασικές Σπουδές στη Σύγχρονη Εκπαίδευση.

## THE AUTHOR

Avgi-Anna Maggel is Senior Consultant of Classical Studies at the Greek Ministry of Education. She graduated from the Department of Philology, University of Athens. She earned her M.A. and PhD in Classics and Greek Drama at the University College London (UCL) under the supervision of Professor Eric W. Handley and Professor Pat E. Easterling. Visiting graduate student: 1) Princeton University, Department of Classics, N.J. USA, research on Theory of Drama and Greek Tragedy with the assistance of Professor Froma Zeitlin (1993). 2) University of Cambridge, Department of Classics (1994-5). Fellowship at the Institute of Classical Studies and the Hellenic Society, University of London (1991-1998). During her graduate studies, she taught Modern Greek, the Tripos Program in the University of Cambridge in collaboration with Dr David Holton. In 1997-1998, she taught the postgraduate Seminar on Greek Drama and she was member of the scientific committee for the postgraduate program in the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Athens. She has been Senior Consultant of Classical Studies at the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute for the implementation and coordination of the national curriculum in the scope of the secondary humanistic education from 2008 to 2012. Since 2000, she lectured on various classical subjects and Greek Theatre in the Universities of Athens, Patras and Peloponnese as an Associate Lecturer. Since 2002, she was appointed by the Hellenic Open University to teach Ancient Greek Literature and Greek Theatre in the undergraduate Program 'Hellenic Culture Studies' with the use of e-learning methods, online platforms and distance learning key principles. She has widely published on Ancient Greek Literature and Language, Greek Drama, Greek Lyric, Classical Reception and Literary Translation from English and French. She is working on a research project for Classics in Contemporary Education.