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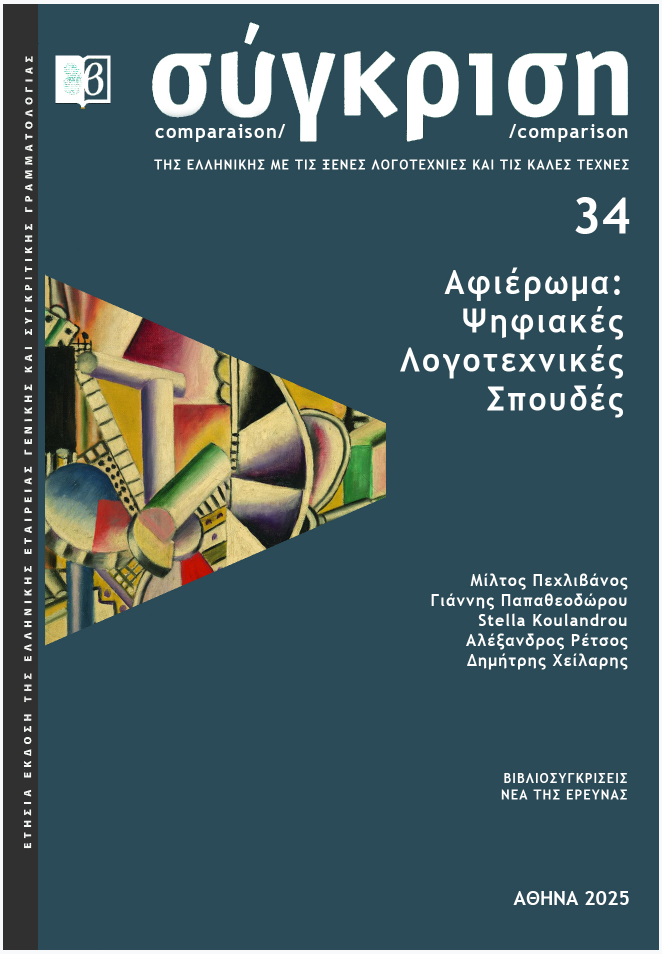

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Philoctetes then and now: Sophocles-Ritsos-Müller

The tragic myth is a stable source of inspiration for the contemporary literature, dramaturgy, and art. However, the myth of Philoctetes is not as popular as other myths, like those of Electra, Antigone or Oedipus. Really interesting is the comparative study of the way that the myth is transformed by Sophocles in his *Philoctetes* (409 BC), with two contemporary views of the myth, that were written in the same year (1965): *Philoctetes* of Yannis Ritsos and *Philoctetes* of Heiner Müller.[1] The greek and german modern views of the myth, despite their differences, have a primarily political character, in contrast with the ancient play. In any case, it is obvious that the myth is interpreted and is adjusted to the current way of thinking and to the given circumstances.

The rewriting of the myth

The dilemmas that emerge from the Sophoclean tragedy in contrasting pairs: aim and means, isolation and communication, alienation and integrity, are diachronic. *Philoctetes* is full of dramatic upsets, in such a way that the readers and spectators are in permanent uncertainty about the heroes' aims and their future acts. At the same time, the two of the central heroes waver, they follow an “inner” course before to decide “what to do”, which drives to a situation that requires the divine intervention, so that the end comes. The ambiguity and the uncertainty, that the persons' behavior and the situations of the play provoke, allow, exactly, multiple interpretations of the tragic text, according to each “context”. For Julia Kristeva, the intertextuality proves that “the meaning” is not “given” or “standard”, nor it comes from a “transcendent ego”, and that each text is “under” other texts.[2] Consequently, each following text gives different “keys” of interpretation and it proposes a different kind of reading, or even “misreading”, of the first text of reference.

Philoctetes of Ritsos is a really bold, enigmatic and subversive theatrical monologue. Only a few themes and motifs are remaining from the ancient tragedy–and these are differentiated. In general, the differentiation and the abstraction of basic elements of the play-model aim to the transposition from the external act to the internal conscience;[3] the modern play is enacted in the interior. The uninhabited island now maybe is–maybe is not Lemnos; the sailors of the tragic chorus are transformed into voices and laughters of young boys-spectrums, who bathe, exercise, wrestle on the sea-shore. The stone and unhospitable cave of Sophocles is beautified to a conformed home. The monologue, in opposition to

[1] Another known enough version of the Sophocles' play is *The cure at Troy: A version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* of Seamus Heaney (1990). The Irish poet relates the myth of Philoctetes with the civil war in North Ireland, in order to provoke the hope of the reconciliation. Heracles, the oppressed subconscious of Philoctetes, by the chorus's voice, incites the hero to dismiss his hate and to serve in the army for the common target with the Greeks in Troy.
[2] Kristeva 1974, p. 339.
[3] Maronitis 2005, p. 47. D. Tziovas believes that it could be argued that Ritsos' monologue is a poem about identity and a play with masks (2014, p. 297-317).

what was expected, is interpreted by a young man, with some of Achilles' characteristics, but more intellectual, maybe his son, Neoptolemus– and not by Philoctetes, whose speech came first. The young man is confessing, in front of the silent man, provoking the sense of a mutual reflection. Neoptolemus narrates his life, underlying how much the Trojan war transformed it: with its forced influence firstly and with its cruel reality afterwards; these war traumatic experiences are their common reference point.

Revoking the tragic myth as an example of the common experience and as a model of a poetic thought on the authority's mechanisms, Müller appropriates it completely and he hangs up in its body new elements, borrowing forms and themes from other poets. His *Philoctetes* is an original adaption of the sophoclean tragedy, a "didactic" play, a parable for the paradox of the current–and of the diachronic– politics. He keeps the basic phases of the play-model, even the main dialogues at some points. Philoctetes here is not rejected for theological reasons, but because he was "useless" anymore. In the Sophocles' play, it was difficult for Greeks to give him up–in opposition with the modern play. Neoptolemus and Odysseus are not driven by an oracle, but by the soldiers' denial to fight; the main hero is an emblem, a political instrument, whose influence on his men Odysseus wants to use to incite them. The biggest overthrow of the modern play is its end: Neoptolemus hits on the back Philoctetes, in order to save the Greek affair. Odysseus decides to take advantage of his corpse, telling the army that the hero had been murdered by a trojan team, since they had not been able to convince him– neither by money nor by violence–to fight at their side.

The heroic element

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is a three men play–there is no woman. Their specific characteristics are very important. The tragedy dramatizes the struggle between three completely different persons. The central heroes (Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, Odysseus) are called to "serve" their own duty: Philoctetes is distinguished for his characteristic Sophoclean "heroism" (the Sophocles' hero is differentiated for his ancestor's pride, the feeling of honour, the faith to the ideals, and for his dogged courage).[4] He is more influenced by the part of the heroic code which orders not to tolerate the offence and to aim at the reparation until the limbs; he refuses to help his own self, executing his duty for his compatriots, if by this way he also helps his enemies.[5] The other exemplars of the heroic way of life have perished in the war,

[4] Philoctetes' obstinacy has been observed by the chorus: "σύ τοι κατηξίωσας, ὦ βαρύποτμε, κούκ ἄλλοθεν ἀ τύχα ἄδ' ἀπὸ μείζονος· εὖτέ γε παρὸν φρονῆσαι λῴονος δαίμονος εἵλου τὸ κάκιον αἱνεῖν" (It is you, man whose fate is grievous, who have chosen this; this fortune has not come to you from one more powerful; for when it was possible to show good sense, you chose to approve the worse, rather than the better fate, 1095-1100) and by Neoptolemus: "ἀνθρώποισιν τὰς μὲν ἐκ θεῶν τύχας δοθείσας ἔστ' ἀναγκαῖον φέρειν· ὅσοι δ' ἐκουσίοισιν ἔγκεινται βλάβαις, ὥσπερ σύ, τούτοις οὔτε συγγνώμην ἔχειν δίκαιόν ἐστιν οὔτ' ἐποικτίρειν τινά. σὺ δ' ἠγρίωσαι, κοὔτε σύμβουλον δέχῃ, ἐάν τε νουθετῇ τις εὐνοίᾳ λέγων, στυγεῖς πολέμιον δυσμενῆ θ' ἡγούμενος" (The fortunes given them by the gods men are obliged to bear; but those who are the prey of damage that is self-inflicted it is wrong that any should be sorry for or pity! You have become savage, and will not accept a counsellor, and if anyone tries to teach you, speaking with good will, you turn your back on him, thinking him as enemy and an ill-wisher, 1316-1323).

[5] H. Roismann focuses on the play's adaptation of Homer and on the Philoctetes' affinity with Achilles (2005, p. 57-71).

and the survivors, including Odysseus, live by other standards: of relativism, opportunism, compromise and change, all foreign to Philoctetes. He has a strong desire for vengeance and a strong feeling of hate for the responsibles for his disaster: he wants them to suffer as much as he does–"οἳ' αὐτοῖς τύχοι" (may they get such themselves, 275)... "τοιαῦτ' Ἀτρεῖδαί μ' ἥ τ' Ὀδυσσέως βία, ὦ παῖ, δεδράκασ'· οἷς Ὀλύμπιοι θεοὶ δοῖέν ποτ' αὐτοῖς ἀντίποιν' ἐμοῦ παθεῖν" (that is what the sons of Atreus and the mighty Odysseus have done to me, my son; may the Olympian gods grant that in requital they suffer such things themselves, 314-316)... "ὦ ξένε Κεφαλλήν, εἴθε σοῦ διαμπερὲς στέρνων ἵκοιτ' ἄλγησις ἥδε... ὦ διπλοῖ στρατηλάται, Ἀγάμεμνον, ὦ Μενέλαε, πῶς ἂν ἀντ' ἐμοῦ τὸν ἴσον χρόνον τρέφοιτε τήνδε τὴν νόσον" (Cephallenian stranger, I wish this pain would go right through your chest!... O you two generals, Agamemnon, O Menelaus, if only instead of me may you feed this sickness for an equal time!, 791-795)–. He gains our sympathy, when he describes his loneliness and abandonment, when we see him in the agony of his spasm, and we hear his anxiety that Neoptolemus may not take him home, because of his loud groans and noxious odour. The main hero is a "noble" hero, who has been cut for ten years off the human community, so some of his "human" characteristics–interior/psychical and exterior/physical–have been falsified. At first, he is touched and he takes courage by the seemingly positive behavior of Neoptolemus, but since the trap is revealed, he is offended and angered, while he accuses the young man that he puts to shame his heroic "nature". His sophoclean heroic obstinacy suffers twice: by the threatened death–by the renewed pressure of Neoptolemus. Afterwards, having again the arc and reserving the promise that he will be treated, he faces the biggest dilemma: "οἴμοι, τί δράσω;" (Alas, what am I to do?, 1350). He rocks temporarily, but finally the hostility (for the responsibles for his disaster) wins the friendship (for Neoptolemus).

Neoptolemus, on the other hand, is carrying "the weight" of a famous father, the heritage "κρατίστου πατρὸς Ἑλλήνων" (the son of the noblest father among the Greeks, 3) –Odysseus calls him: "Ἀχιλλέως παῖ" (son of Achilles, 50) and Philoctetes: "φιλτάτου παῖ πατρός" (son of the dearest of fathers, 242)–, while he participates in a community of glorious fighters. He has shouldered the duty to accompany a glorious man, who impresses him and whom he tries to impress; Odysseus tries to persuade him, telling him that they will call him brave and wise. Neoptolemus lives in the clash between his duty to obey his superiors and to serve the common aim of his compatriots, with his "nature": according to the aristocratic ideal of the era, the noble modus is innate–Odysseus admits that the young man "has been born" not to lie. The choice is difficult, because the question the tragedy explores is not what is right in abstract terms, but what is the right course of action under circumstances where the moral and the practical are at odds or where different moral goods collide. Neoptolemus' "drama" is that at first he violates his nature, against his will, and at the end he refinds himself, through a painful course: Philoctetes calls him to "find himself" and he finally congratulates him on having shown his "nature". He fights his personal feelings, his will to be faith to his new friend ["οὐκ ἄχθομαί σ' ἰδών τε καὶ λαβὼν φίλον" (I am not sorry to have met you and got you as a friend, 671)–it is characteristic that Philoctetes enters in the cave based on him], whose view provokes him genuine sympathy, to preserve his virtue. He wonders: "ἅπαντα δυσχέρεια, τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν ὅταν λιπών τις δρᾷ τὰ μὴ προσεικότα... ὦ Ζεῦ, τί δράσω;" (Everything is distasteful, when a man has abandoned his own nature and is doing what is unlike him!... O Zeus, what am I to do?,

902-908). He understands that he is the reponsible. At first, he refuses the deceit, the hypocrisy, the cunning, "οὓς ἂν τῶν λόγων ἁλγεῖ κλύων" (things which it distresses him to hear spoken, 86), and he chooses the "heroic" violence. When he comes back, he has refound his nature, he has been completely delivered from Odysseus' influence. Having understood that the trap is excluded and that the violence is uneffective, he has only the persuasion: he uses arguments (it is for the common good and it is gods' will that Philoctetes goes to Troy), that are fruitless, as Philoctetes has been irretrievable influenced by his previous hypoctitical behavior. Neoptolemus is called to choose definitely: he cannot both follow his honour's code and win the war glory. He sees Odysseus' dishonesty mobilised to serve the aims of community and god's will, but also how that dishonesty corrodes the trust on which relationships are based; at the same time, he sees Philoctetes as morally superior, but also how his integrity is inseparable from his rage, running counter to the divine plan, dooming him to isolation, and leading to death and destruction. So, Neoptolemus solves his ethical problem and he makes his decision.

Odysseus, finally, seems to be the "bad guy" of the story, an unheroic person– but, in fact, he remains ambiguous enough.[6] He is a "politician",[7] who twists logic and language to his own purpose, who thinks himself and wants Neoptolemus to be an executive body, a "servant" of the national interest: "ὑπέρ τ' Ἀτρειδῶν τοῦ τε σύμπαντος στρατοῦ" (in the name of the sons of Atreus and the whole army!, 1294), while he also presents himself as "Zeus' instrument": "Ζεύς ἐσθ', ἵν' εἰδῇς, Ζεύς, ὁ τῆσδε γῆς κρατῶν, Ζεύς, ᾧ δέδοκται ταῦθ'· ὑπηρετῶ δ' ἐγώ" (It is Zeus, let me tell you, Zeus, the ruler of this land, Zeus who has decided this; and I execute his will!, 989-990). He is aware of his "mission". He has the weakness of an executive body. He passes the responsibility to Atreides: "ταχθεὶς τόδ' ἕρδειν τῶν ἀνασσόντων ὕπο" (on the orders of those in command, 6). His avoidance of naming "those in command" (though the audience knows) makes him sound as if he is hiding behind the orders of his superiors; on the other hand, his presentation of religious grounds for abandoning Philoctetes implies that he supported the action as the correct thing. The prize from the fulfilment of his duty is his part in Greeks' victory. His intervention in the achievement of the common goal concerns only tactics–so he makes use of his "known" deceit: "οὗ γὰρ τοιούτων δεῖ, τοιοῦτός εἰμ' ἐγώ· χὤπου δικαίων κἀγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν κρίσις, οὐκ ἂν λάβοις μου μᾶλλον οὐδέν' εὐσεβῆ. νικᾶν γε μέντοι πανταχοῦ χρῄζων ἔφυν" (Where there is need of men like this, I am such a man; but where there is a test for just and noble men, you will find no one more scrupulous than I. But it is my nature always to desire vistory, 1049-1052), activating his unfeelingness and cunning. He also uses persuasion, aiming at the man's ambition–and he earns him. Odysseus, unlike the two others, does not experience any kind of conflict or internal change throughout the play; he remains, from the beginning until the end, faithful to his ideas and his tactics.

Philoctetes of Ritsos is completely transformed: the snake's bite is just mentioned on hint, without its painful and repulsive consequences. This hero is

[6] H. Roismann believes that by drawing Odysseus as an ageing politician, who has lost his youthful idealism, and by showing his antiheroic quality as inseparable from his crudeness, insensitivity and lack of courage, the play demonstrates how little there is to admire in the ethos of deception. Yet the play also allows for a more positive reading of Odysseus' character: as prescient, practical and motivated as much by common interests as personal ones (2005, p. 75).

[7] According S. Schein, Odysseus brings into the play the political and moral world of late fifth-century Athens (2013, p. 20).

healthy, handsome, intellectual– tired from the human mistakes and the political intrigues. He turns his violent abandonment to the island into a lonely hermitment, in order to find his own values and to change the loquacity by the wise silence. The ex heroical archer is now a hermit, away from those who denied and abandoned him– who now want him back, having recognized his importance, in order to capture Troy. The young boy-mediator, who comes "for him" and not for his arms, and who, in opposition with Sophocles' hero, tells him immediately the truth, feels the hero's resistance, but he keeps asking, offering him a mask, which will protect him from those who cannot understand his free and thoughtful face. According to the final stage directions, Philoctetes at last gives in, but he puts the mask on the earth. He returns from the solitude to the companionship, from the silence to the dialogue, from the thoughtful loneliness to the beneficial cooperation– but with the face uncoverted. As he walks through the stones and the thorns, meanwhile, his face starts to look like the mask; because of the circumstances, the poet Philoctetes must collaborate with the fighter Philoctetes.

Neoptolemus, on the other hand, is speaking about himself: how his life is divided in two parts: the home, in the first part, with the autocratic–because of his fame–father, maybe the "statue" of himself, the image in bronze of a proud, unapproachable horseman, and the discreet, transparent, ethereal and distant shadow of the mother–a tender presence amid her permanent absence; the camp, in the second part, the "duty" of the fighter. He feels "binded" with other's debts and obligations; he was growing up with speeches for deaths and for heroes, with "strange" words, that pursued him even in his sleep: they bequeathed them high "standards"–that they did not ask for them (p. 231-235). The choice between the enjoyment of the peaceful life and the superhuman heroism at war is at first "unaccomplished" for him; watching the collapse of the older fighters, he realizes that the delusion that the world can be better through the war is turning to the irritable refusal and to the shaming isolation. Eloquent is the scene when he feels the untying of his belt as a sign of freedom, but then he chooses to re-tie it, trying to transform the unavoidable to a free choice. Neoptolemus faces the childish psychical wound at first and the invitation of life next, through the participation to the war of Troy–and after all these, the consciousness, which he gains when he talks with the older man, who has arrived to the same consciousness through another way.

In the german transcription, there are the three main heroes–with different point of view and different role, nevertheless. Odysseus is the agent of the Authority, the instrument of the ideology of the common interest, who does not hesitate to admit that he gave up Philoctetes, as he was useless, and he asks the young man to become the net that will lead the hermit back to Troy, using the lie as means. Odysseus assures him, as in sophoclean play, that he knows very well that he is not "made" for such actions, but the conquest of Troy comes first– and he promises to look at the right "some other time". He confesses that most people often do "what they do not want to do", obeying to their "duty"; however, since he himself was forced to be incorporated in the state machine, his individuality "is rising". He has learned to transform others as well as himself into instruments for the good and the benefit of their own community; he has even learned to refuse his own self. In this play, some situations seems to be paradoxical, unavoidable: "We are so deeply sticked in this case Trapped by our and the foreign step We do not have an exit unless if we go the way farther on" (p. 68-69). Being an extreme pragmatist,

for whom there are only solutions without any problems, he cannot fail–nevertheless, he has a greatness, when he refuses his own self, and a tragic dimension, when he exposes the new interpretation of the facts:[8] "I wish a god takes me in his sleep. The sky roll out of my eyes, Thunderbolt Lightning, the earth pull from my feet. Nothing is going on. Let's go then, let's replace Again the almost stable earth with the movable... Let's go fast before the god hastily My prayer notices and he really throws me In the sleep with black wings and a killer less Returns home to the shore which the blood is making muddy" (p. 78-79). The author himself considers Odysseus as the most important and the most tragic person of the play.[9]

Idealist Neoptolemus, on the other hand, is not moving away from what Odysseus calls "our affair", meaning the end of the bloody war. That's the reason why he leaves Skyros, "without having taste the life", as his duty was to be in Troy. For their affair, he even sacrifices the revenge of his hated enemy, Odysseus, who holds his father's arms: "My hate belongs to the enemy, that is what the duty requires Until Troy does not exist anymore". Their affair offers excuses for everything, even for the lie to Philoctetes: "Beside my will I deceived him But there was no other way, the lie is duty" (p. 29, 49). The duty that this hero recognizes has validity, according his point of view, also for Philoctetes: having taken his arc, he announces that he will be back, bringing Odysseus with him, to draw him to the ship, as he has his neck yoked to the duty, in opposition with the inflexible neck of the lame hero. But, afterwards, he admits his mistake. He suddenly understands that what he did some day will follow him forever–so, he gives back the arc. The moment, although, that he is ready to take revenge of Odysseus, his ethics pusses him to kill who he wanted to save and to save who he wanted to ruin. Carrying out his duty against his will, his moment of triumph is at once his moment of ignominy; the conqueror is at once the lackey, a paradox that expresses an inherent reality of the totalitarian state, in which no one is truly free.[10]

Philoctetes, finally, is an instrument, sometimes usefull sometimes useless; an instrument for the political expediencies, whose absence now causes damage–so he must be forced to return. The unjust exile, the isolation and the struggle to survive have influenced his mind and they have transformed him into an enemy of his own self. There are two persons who are fighting between them: one who wants to maintain the inflexible attitude, and the other who commands the submission to the yoke, who desires the community, even knowing that is "bloodthirsty".[11] Only Philoctetes resists and maintains his independence throughout, and in so doing ensures his demise. There is no attempt by the writer to elicit pity for the outcast, who mixes self-loathing with hateful invective. Odysseus' pragmatism, nevertheless, has decided that this "political animal" must serve the community– so, he manages to steal his arc, in such a way as to be no other way for him

[8] Lehmann 2008, p. 10.
[9] Lehmann 2008, p. 12 [Müller, H. (1992). *Krieg ohne Schlacht. Leben in zwei Diktaturen: Eine Autobiographie*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, p. 189].
[10] Dugdale 2017, p. 127.
[11] As W. Schivelbusch observes, the negativity is sustained throughout all Müller's plays. In *Philoctetes*, the negativity is complicated, for it is to be found in Philoctetes' enforced isolation, which, in turn, alienates him from society and can only be overcome by force again, that is, by another negation of his individuality: the young warrior Neoptolemus learns through these negations (1974, p. 106).

from the return to Troy.[12] It is remarkable that the leaders of the society in which Philoctetes should participate are so cynical, that the only attitude it might suggest to viewers or readers is that society is not worth participating in, without a radical political transformation that would be truly revolutionary.[13]

The divine element – The justice

Ancient Greeks do not have the idea of an "absolute justice", founded on principles and organized into a coherent system. The concept of the "law" includes the transcendent element and it is also formed according to the gods' will. The oracles often determine the political decisions. In antiquity, the law partly is based on coercion and partly it introduces and it binds sacred forces; among them, the human responsibility is placed.[14] In ancient greek tragedy, in general and despite the controversies and the gradations among the three poets, the faith in the divine justice prevails: the dominant point of view is that everything is, maybe, settled and that the severe punishment of the mortals is aiming to their knowledge and compliance (pathei-mathos). Ancient tragedy reveals the absurdity of the world, but through an optimistic view and in a poetic and grandiose way. According to the tragic poets' weltanschauung, it is well known that the world is cruel and insecure; it is important, however, that gods guarantee the justice and the final harmony. The tragic poets –Euripides maybe a little more– sometimes undermined it, but they did not deny it radically nor they abolish it substantially.

Sophocles, without seeking the solution to some kind of god's justice, is aware of the fact that the actions of the god may appear as a punishment for the human disrespect, but at the same time they may not be morally interpretable. As Neoptolemus observes, gods have given Philoctetes a suffering for some good reason that only them know. Philoctetes believes that the righteous man must hate his enemies and love his friends–and that this principle is welcomed by the gods; sometimes, however, he feels wronged and victim of merciless gods, he tends to dispute their "wisdom": "ποῦ χρὴ τίθεσθαι ταῦτα, ποῦ δ' αἰνεῖν, ὅταν τὰ θεῖ' ἐπαινῶν τοὺς θεοὺς εὕρω κακούς;" (How can we account for this, and how can we approve it, when if we survey the actions of the gods we find that the gods are evil?, 451-452). He is faithful to the duty-code of the heroism, but his long-lasting isolation made its negative side dominant in his emotional world. This tragedy demonstrates the complicity between the "given" fate and the human decision: gods submit Philoctetes to this fate–Neoptolemus threatens their plans–Philoctetes must voluntarily go to Troy–gods send Heracles. Fate is mixed up with the human motives: the power of fate dominates, and the hero's inflexible will subsides. Heracles emphasizes the positive side of the code of heroism and he ultimately convinces Philoctetes; he can reach him in a way that Neoptolemus cannot, as he appeals to him in the name of their old friendship and of the authority of Zeus. Heracles replaces the sophoclean concept of honour, in which the refusal to forgive a personal insult is a core element, with a concept more appropriate to the

[12] B. Kaute argues that the impossibility to re-integrate the excluded Philoctetes into the greek society corresponds to the aporia of modern (post)Kantian enlightenment, that is, to the problem of how the self-enlightening subject can create a difference to itself under the presupposition of the self (2005, p. 327).
[13] Schein 2013, p. 55.
[14] Biscardi 1998, p. 118-119· McDowel 1996, p. 74.

needs of the polis. In commanding Philoctetes to go to Troy, he says that he must relinquish his sense of personal injury, however deep or justified, and act towards the common goal.

The nucleus of the Philoctetes' myth is not simply the exclusion of someone, who does not fit in, but it is rather the act of creating a reversal to exclusion by re-integrating the excluded element and re-estabhishing coherence. Ancient Greeks understood the need to work for the common good even to the point, sometimes, of sacrificing their personal interests; to accept the decisions of the majority, even where they disagreed with them; to obey the laws and support state institutions. The end leaves the spectator with an ambiguous sense of justice: the merciless generals are rewarded; meanwhile, Philoctetes has a new friend, with whom he shares the same ideals; Heracles' ultimate advice predicts the impiety and the unfortunate end of the army. The imperishable piety that Heracles enjoins retains something of the remoteness of the gods. Their immortal vision sweeps the perspectives of eternity. Philoctetes, however, is denied "justice". His reunion with the host does not contain forgiveness. He gives in the divine behest of his friend Heracles and in the fulfillment of his new heroic friend. The play moves toward reconciliation at the end, but Sophocles does not obscure the gap that still remains between men and god and between base men and the noble hero whom they have victimized.[15]

For Sophocles, tragic is inherent in the rules of heroism. His heroes go beyond the common measure– and every exceeding involves risks; the chorus is eloquent: "ὦ παλάμαι θεῶν, ὦ δύστανα γένη βροτῶν, οἷς μὴ μέτριος αἰών" (O contrivances of the gods! O unhappy race of mortals to whom life is unkind!, 177-179). A vague divine plan seems to smoulder in Philoctetes' fate. Fate is interpreted as an "order"; divine justice is imposed through an insuperable law, through the punishment of the ruiner of this order. Heracles' intervention is necessary to resolve the human impasse. He is the model of inexhaustible endurance, which can be sure of its reward–a central theme in sophoclean theology.[16] As B.M.W. Knox argues, sophoclean hero acts in a terrifying vacuum, an isolation in time and space which imposes on him the full responsibility for his own action and its consequences. The poet creates a tragic universe in which man's heroic action, free and responsible, brings him sometimes through suffering to victory but more often to a fall which is both defeat and victory at once. Yet, gods are presences felt at every turn of the action and they have more concern and respect for the hero, even when he seems to fight against them.[17]

In Ritsos' monologue, Heracles does not appear, while his arc is missing and there are only one shield and three spears. Consequently, the "inherited" bond of archer Heracles with archer Philoctetes has been abolished–Philoctetes is alone

[15] Segal 1995, p. 118.

[16] As Ch. Segal observes, all of Sophocles' extant work is in a sense a study in piety. Through his divinities he does not establish a clear theodicy but rather explores the possibility that our lives may have a purpose and a meaning beyond the narrow motives of profit, success, position, or even personal happiness that men and women define as their goals. *Philoctetes* is no simple defense of conventional religiosity or a declaration of faith that the god's will must prevail. The god's workings attest to the presence of something vast, mysterious, and portentous in a human life. They both offer and attend upon greatness, but their presence is also a sign of the imminent disruption of life that tragic greatness entails. To stand out in one's heroic isolation and strenght is to invite the dangerous play of divine forces about one's life, and vice versa (1995, p. 95, 97).

[17] Knox 1964, p. 5-7.

and the attempt to his abduction from the desert island has now other method and other meaning. The man let the snake–of the "wisdom"–to bite him, so he can have a nice pretext to be isolated, to exist substantially and not to lose himself. The two heroes are both tormented by the sadness of the pillaged life, of the useless violence, of the vanity. Neoptolemus suffers from an internal wound, Philoctetes from an external–they both have an excuse to escape from the "invitation of life". They are intellectuals–but in life there is also the people, who now takes the place of the "deus ex machina" Heracles–it is the power which pushes Philoctetes to take his responsibility and to participate in the common purpose. Every intellectual, having consciousness of the vanity of the world, can escape for a while, but he must return consciously to the common action. The hero's face is becoming younger and more positive, looking like "the mask of action". The "magic" arms are the only resistance against death, who threats both the hero and the civilization.[18] What prevails in this play is not the feeling of loneliness and of lack, the knowledge of vanity, of destruction and of death, but the poet's Message: the admiring heroism in front of the Creation, even if it is absurd. Man passes the porte and, with all his weakness, his efforts and his defeats, he enters in the Universe. Philoctetes can symbolize the human spirit, whose best manifestation is Poetry, which is the only way to fight the "Troy" of decay and death:[19] "What's to be done? Only such victories exist. Let us go" (p. 247). After the victory, when they will wonder why they came, why they fought, why and where they are returning (a repeated question in Ritsos' theatrical monologues), Philoctetes' wisdom will be more indispensable than ever.

Gods, their grace and their miracles are absents in Müller's world. Philoctetes was not bitten by the snake in the realm of Golden nymph, no oracle is engaged, Heracles does not appear at the end to give the solution and to break the impasse; gods are well mentioned, but weightlessness. In this way, Odysseus assures Neoptolemus, before he meets Philoctetes, that the case is on his hand. Consequently, Philoctetes thinks that gods are "unemployed" and Odysseus that they do not have any ethical weight, when he is cruel to Neoptolemus' sympathy for the lame hero: "Spit your compassion, it has a blood flavour There is no place for the virtue here, there is no time now. About the gods do not ask, you only live with people" (p. 69). Gods exist only for the leisure time, not for the important decisions. Man is alone– no superior power, feeling sorry, helps him. Müller's "tragedy" ends without comfort, precisely because it comes away empty-handed: it does not get what it needs in order to be a tragedy. The necessary condition of a tragedy is a dialectical contradiction: an element contains its own negation, it is contradictory in itself, and the synthesis leads to the abolishment of this contradiction, not necessarily resulting in harmony but in progress. Synthesis brings along the comfort belonging to tragedy. This Philoctetes does not suffer and die in the name of an idea– he dies "in the name" of the emptiness and nothingness.[20] So, Müller's play does not recognize a solution, an outlet; however, there is a strange element in the sound of this language, another world which is hidden and which needs to be decoded, where the war would not be the beginning and the end, the frame and the content, the reason and its consequences.[21]

[18] Bien 1975, p. 71-74.
[19] Leivaditis 1975, p. 230-231.
[20] Kaute 2005, p. 335-337.
[21] Lehmann 2008, p. 15.

The mythological element

Ancient Greek tragedy is placed between two "worlds": the myth and the reality of 5th century. Ancient tragedy, certainly, appeals the myth not in its first "magic-religious" dimension, but with its next significance, as a dynamic system of symbols and meanings, which form a literary text. Myth does not contain a true story– it contains an historical truth. The interventions of the tragic poets to myth opened the way to its literary, artistic and ideological exploitation, processing and transformation–myth's dedication, "grounding" and demystification were the assumption of its aestheticization.[22] In ancient tragedy, there are many elements active: the political, the historical, the philosophical, the sociological, the psychoanalytical; the mythological element, nevertheless, is always vivid.

Consequently, in *Philoctetes* the mythological element, beside all other elements, remains strong: the main hero was bitten by a snake and he suffers–he did not die nor he has been treated– for ten years, until god cures him at Troy; everything is covered under a "mythological" veil, it is not explained in a "scientific" way. As regards the optics on the war, it is obvious that the "heroic" element is very strong in Sophocles; his heros exhibit their warlike virtue and they are confirmed through it: it is eloquent that Neoptolemus prefers the "heroic" violence from the deceit. Nevertheless, the young man for a moment underlines that: "πόλεμος οὐδέν' ἄνδρ' ἐκὼν αἱρεῖ πονηρόν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς χρηστοὺς ἀεί" (war never willingly destroys a villain, but always noble men, 436-437), before they all together decide to go "heroically" to "take" Troy–the war is not "de-mystificated" in ancient tragedy–especially in Sophocles–as much as in modern tragedy.

In addition, while the "mark" of the current social-political atmosphere, through the personal beliefs and the personal memories of the poet, is strong in contemporary tragedies, it does not happen the same in Sophocles.[23] The theme of the opposition between "nature" and "education", central in the sophistic worldview, is only implied "indirectly" in the ancient play.[24] Sophocles died in the same year with Euripides–but he was older and, unlike Euripides, he had not been influenced by the sophistic beliefs, according to which the virtue and the "excellence" are neither innate nor inherited, but teachable; Neoptolemus' "nature" is opposed to the bad advices, but, at the end, the divine intervention becomes necessary, to impose the justice. With Heracles' last advice: "τοῦτο δ' ἐννοεῖθ', ὅταν πορθῆτε γαῖαν, εὐσεβεῖν τὰ πρὸς θεούς· ὡς τἆλλα πάντα δεύτερ' ἠγεῖται πατὴρ Ζεύς. οὐ γὰρ ηὐσέβεια συνθήσκει βροτοῖς· κἂν ζῶσι κἂν θάνωσιν, οὐκ ἀπόλλυται" (But remember when you conquer the land to show reverence to the gods; for all things come after this in the mind of Zeus my father. For reverence for the gods does not die along with mortals; whether they live or die, it never perishes, 1440-1444) it is not justice that triumphs, but piety– and this "message" is really sophoclean.

[22] Veloudis 1992, p. 61-66.
[23] H. Roismann thinks that *Philoctetes* does not refer to any events nor can any of its dramatis personae be taken as stand-ins for any of the political figures of Sophocles' day (2005, p. 69). However, some scholars argue that there are political implications in the play. Between others: Jouanna 2007· Griffin 1999, p. 73-94· Heath 2006, p. 253-282.
[24] de Romilly 1996, p. 117-133.

"Taught" by the atrocities, the dissensions and the disappointments of the political life, Ritsos studied his contemporary issues not as "national" problems but as historical– that is diachronical. For this reason, he turned to the tragic myth, the best way to see how "history"–Philoctetes' in this case–would be transformed in our days. The tragic hero is called to leave his political isolation, to join the army in Troy and to take part in the life of his compatriots; at the same time, he is required to abandon his artistic isolation, to return to the community and to have share in its "affairs". The most terrible aspect of his absolute loneliness is "the lack of objects"–that is what an artist needs the most, not for his own use, but for the connection, for the comparison and for the presence. Someone becomes "the great silence of his being", when exactly his voice is extinguished. Philoctetes, in order to fulfill his "duty"–as an intellectual/an artist/a human being, must return to Troy, without leaving his freedom, but bringing it with him, also his silence, and must compose them with his action in a world which is not governed by freedom but by necessity. The hero had realized during his isolation that his loneliness and his freedom are nothing but another form of death; but if the contrasts come together, the oppositions are contracted and the creativity can arise. The great poetry, after all, urges, in low voice–therefore more persuasively–, to live, to collaborate, to participate and to create.

Müller uses consciously the tragic myth as an allegory of the political becoming, as a refraction of the social situations and the historical facts. He does not consider myth and history in opposition to one another, but he simply treats them as materials that must be assembled. His way to bring politics into the theatre is to address the crucial problems precisely, using mythological motifs and images. The refering functioning of the mythological examples to the direct external reality brings about the breaking off the myth in the history, but at the same time about the mythification of the events.[25] Müller's purpose is to interpret the contemporary reality, to correctly understand–that presupposes the knowledge and the assimilation–the past, since many contemporary events and situations are its consequences. The past is a mirror in which the present sees its real image as a continuation and a consistency of the history–and this is clear in the "Brecht's"-self-referent, metatheatrical, Prologue of the play, which reminds to the spectators that they are in the theatre and not in the "myth": "Dear audience, the play we are about to show Will waft you from today to long ago When man was foe to man, when life was tough, And every month another bloody war came off" (p. 19).[26]

The transcription of the myth by the german writer, nevertheless, just like Ritsos', does not have only a direct timely dimension, but also a diachronic/diatopic one– the play is "political" in a wider sense; eloquent are the "observations" of the writer: during the last exit of Odysseus and Neoptolemus with the dead Phil-

[25] Varopoulou 1997, p. 13-14. S. Patsalidis, in addition, believes that Müller visits the classical plays threw the binoculars of a post-modern sensitiveness, sealing them with the experiences of nowadays. He sucks them just like the leeches, he empties them, he dries them, he exhibits them in the wax statues museum (2004, p. 507).

[26] W. Schivelbusch believes that Müller's development from realistic portrayal, in plays about industrial production, to parable form represents aesthetic emancipation from immediate reality. This development is at once positive and negative: while the parable form allows for greater universality, this universality is at the same time made possible at the expense of historical and social concretion. A play like *Philoctetes* can be seen as a parable about the dialectics of the Enlightenment, and it can be seen as a parable about the dialectics of socialist enlightenment (1974, p. 106.)

octetes, pictures could be shown, relevant to the History of the war. In those societies, where the personal codes of truth conflict with those of the political opportunism, it is intense the need to preserve idols. So, the authority always prefers to perpetuate a myth, even if it is false, because the purpose and the profit determine everything. Müller's caustic writing manages to completely demystify this ruinous deceit, which is called war; to make ridiculous the self-invited saviours-warlords, to reveal their vanity, leaving them woefully powerless, victims of humbles instigations. Consequently, since the myth-war and its people managed to survive until our days, not as a myth but as a terrible reality, and to be based on the very same technique of the deceit, the poet aims at our awakening and self-consciousness.

In conclusion

"Yet this wearisome repetition, finally, seems transformed into something good, almost wholesome– it gives you the vague impression of being at once fleeting and inexhaustible, a tranquil endurance, something unknown yet familiar– it relieves you– a notion of fearful eternity– but eternity, notwithstanding".[27]

As it turned out, Sophocles does not use the myth with primarily political and topical aims, but in order to speak generally about the issue of ethics and specifically about the limits of expedience, nobility and glory. *Philoctetes* is not a political play, in the narrow sense of the term; it deals with universal issues, that cross cultures and generations, and it does not take a clear stand on the issues of those days. The relations among the three persons and the issues they grapple with can be appreciated without knowledge of the sophistic, of the athenian democracy, of the bitter and demoralising peloponnesian war. The two contemporary writers, on the contrary, are mostly inspired by more specific political motives; yet their plays are also timeless and universal. In modern plays, the history is mythologized, while the myth is "dissolved" in history. The autobiographical references in Ritsos' poems are well known. At the end, poet Philoctetes cooperates with fighter Philoctetes–the double nature, namely, of Ritsos: poet, fighter/exile. Müller drew on greek tragedy as a vehicle by which to explore political themes; in his play evident are specific political realities, people and situations of the stalinist period, the German Democratic Republic and the capitalist West.

As regards the optics on the war, it is obvious that war is not "de-mystificated" in Sophocles (the heroic element is strong) as much as in modern tragedy, the caustic voice of which completely ridicules the ruinous deceit which is called war. Ritsos uncovers the illusion that the world can be reformed through war. The wisdom of Philoctetes, who now voluntarily participates in the war, will demonstrate, after the end, the futility of the undertaking. The greek poet adds a new dimension to the reception of the myth: Iam alive means I participate in an absurd world. We must go to Troy, but we must go no longer deceived by mechanisms that history itself has refuted, or by cheap and bankrupt myths, but moving forward with our eyes wide open, without illusions, conveying our "silence", within which new forces will be released, which will serve humanity as a bridge to the future. Müller's play is the most caustic about the war, as it shows that "war professionals" (Odysseus) usurp even the dead, a masterpiece of false war propaganda, in the name of profit; even in death, Philoctetes is used and abused. It is

[27] Ritsos, "Chrysothemis", *The Fourth Dimension*, 1993, p. 153.

characteristic that here war's aims are never mentioned, yet it is equired that all join in. This play takes place in a de-heroized world, in which the only ethics are Philoctetes' intense hatred for Odysseus and Atreides, Neoptolemus' ambition, impulsiveness, and competing loyalty to his mission and ethical misgivings about the deception it involves, and Odysseus' cruelty and opportunistic willingness to do anything in order to win.[28] Müller's play ends like the sophoclean, with the successful completion of the mission, but now consummated through hate, not friendship; this mission is clearly in the name of nothingness.

Regarding the transcendental issue, the divine presence is intense in ancient tragedy. Heracles' appearance, maybe,[29] gives a kind of meaning to Philoctetes' suffering. In the sophoclean version of the myth, the snakebite that led to Philoctetes' ten years' torment was precipitated by an inadvertent transgression. Heracles gives it meaning, by drawing an analogy between his own destiny and Philoctetes', so he reconciles him to his destiny. Divine intervention not only returns the plot to its traditional course (Philoctetes must go to Troy), but also establishes the proper moral hierarchy (If we assume that the "common good", namely the conquest of Troy, must precede Philoctetes' insistence). In the two modern plays, on the contrary, god is absent. People only live with people and they are not allowed to ask about the gods. Here man stands alone, without any "fairy tales", to face the merciless reality. Although, both writers urge to go for the "only such" victories that exist.

In any case, the conclusion from the "parallel reading" of these three plays is that from antiquity to modern times tragic myth is still relevant and alive, as it contains questions that remain unanswered. Tragic has descended from heaven to earth, but the question remains the same. As Müller's clown says: It lacks a Message to take home and frame.

[28] Schein 2013, p. 54.

[29] As R.G. Ussher notes, Philoctetes is tortured and will be. The play with its last surprise brings superficial happiness, but joy at promised health and kleos disappears in agony and bitterness of soul. He knows the mind of Zeus and will submit to it, but such submission is the triumph of his enemies whom now he must, as the price of his own salvation, save. The exile will, indeed, return to the community, but here is no romance, no hope for virtue to "live happily ever after". This is a tragic figure, for whom heaven has ordained, in promised happiness, enduring sorrow (1990, p. 11). A. Tessitore, in addition, points out that Sophocles' deus ex machina calls for piety but provides no adequate answer to the human deman for justice. Indeed, the price to be paid for healing includes not only the unjustified horror that makes healing necessary, but also return to a political world in which injustice flourishes. The resolution to which the play looks requires that Philoctetes' sense of indignation gives way to an acceptance of the always limited character of justice in the human world of politics while, at the same time, leaving open a question about the justice of the gods' themsemves (2003, p. 84).

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Περίληψη

Στέλλα Κουλάνδρου

Ο Φιλοκτήτης τότε και τώρα: Σοφοκλής – Ρίτσος – Μύλλερ

Τα διλήμματα που αναδύονται από τον σοφόκλειο *Φιλοκτήτη* (409 π.Χ.), σε αντιθετικά ζεύγη –σκοπός και μέσον, απομόνωση και συμμετοχή, αλλοτρίωση και ακεραιότητα– είναι διαχρονικά. Το έργο βρίθει δραματικών ανατροπών, έτσι ώστε οι δέκτες να βρίσκονται σε μόνιμη αβεβαιότητα ως προς τις προθέσεις των ηρώων και τις μελλοντικές τους πράξεις. Την ίδια στιγμή, δύο από τους κεντρικούς ήρωες διστάζουν, ακολουθούν κάποια «εσωτερική» πορεία, προτού να αποφασίσουν «τι να κάνουν», γεγονός που οδηγεί σε αδιέξοδο, το οποίο απαιτεί τη θεϊκή παρέμβαση, προκειμένου να δοθεί η λύση. Η αμφισημία και η αμηχανία που προκαλούν η δράση των προσώπων και οι καταστάσεις επιτρέπουν, ακριβώς, πολλαπλές ερμηνείες του τραγικού κειμένου, ανάλογα με το εκάστοτε «πλαίσιο». Ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζει η συγκριτική μελέτη του τρόπου με τον οποίον ο μύθος μεταπλάθεται από τον Σοφοκλή, με δύο σύγχρονες εκδοχές του μύθου, που γράφτηκαν το ίδιο έτος (1965): τον *Φιλοκτήτη* του Γιάννη Ρίτσου και τον *Φιλοκτήτη* του Heiner Müller. Τόσο η νεοελληνική όσο και η γερμανική εκδοχή του μύθου, παρά τις διαφορές τους, έχουν πρωταρχικά πολιτικό χαρακτήρα, σε αντίθεση με τη σοφόκλεια τραγωδία. Σε κάθε περίπτωση, είναι προφανές ότι ο μύθος μεταπλάθεται και προσαρμόζεται στην εκάστοτε κοσμοαντίληψη και στις περιρρέουσες συνθήκες.