Betrayed, Berserk, and Abandoned: War Trauma in Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*

by

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* can be read as allegories of warriors who experience war trauma. The ancient Greeks already knew of the effects of war trauma through prior literature, and the plays were produced during a period of great violence and upheaval. *Ajax* shows how a shame-inducing betrayal causes a warrior to go berserk, and consequently withdraw from his community and commit suicide. *Philoctetes* shows that a betrayal, combined with the loss of a comrade, can cause the warrior to become isolated and emotionally vulnerable. His only means of being reintegrated into society is through mutual understanding with members of that society, and closure with his dead comrade. These plays were produced for therapeutic benefit, as shown by the comparative evidence found in psychodrama, dramatherapy, and the *Theater of War* productions of the two plays.

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Introduction

In 1994, Johnathan Shay published his book, *Achilles in Vietnam*, in which he used the text of the *Iliad* to catalogue "the specific nature of catastrophic war experiences that not only cause lifelong disabling psychiatric symptoms but can *ruin* good character" (Shay 1994, xiii). In doing so, he brought to light a new side of the figure of Achilles by showing his deep isolation from the Greek army's community and his berserker state brought on by the death of his companion, Patroclus. Shay showed that Achilles' final moments of glory were, in fact, a berserk state brought on by the trauma of losing Patroclus.

Since the book's publication, a considerable amount of scholarly work has taken Shay's lens and applied it to ancient Greek history and literature. Lawrence Tritle, a Vietnam veteran himself and a classical scholar, published the work *From Melos to My Lai* (2000), which applied Shay's reading of the *Iliad* to the broader world of Classical Greece, drawing primarily on the works of Herodotus and Thucydides. Meagher later applied this viewpoint in a commentary in his translation of *Heracles Gone Mad* (2006). Drawing on these works and Shay's 1995 article in *Didaskalia*,[1] a program called *Theater of War* was formed, through which readings of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* have been recited to war veterans and their families across the United States and Europe.

Considering the rise in interest in the role of war trauma in ancient Greek history and literature, it is surprising that no major work so far has closely read either *Ajax* or *Philoctetes* in this light. Even the most thorough works on the subject, such as Tritle's,

[1] In this article, Shay argues that Athenian theater fulfilled a purpose similar to communal therapy. This will be discussed further in Chapter Four. See page 89.

only make an occasional reference to the two tragedies, and have not done a close reading of the plays. In fact, such a reading demonstrates how war destroys trust, isolates soldiers from their community, and even causes them to go berserk. Kamienski's article on dangerous pharmacological trends in the treatment of traumatized veterans draws on this scholarship on *Ajax* briefly, but does not discuss *Philoctetes* in detail (Kamienski 2012, 397-398). Meineck's review of a *Theater of War* staging does not answer the question of why their choice of these two particular plays is so effective.

My goal in the course of this work is to show the relevance of the two plays to war veteran communities by doing a close reading of the plays themselves, and also considering their context and theatrical use. In doing so, I will establish three premises as foundation to the overall argument: first, that Athenian society was heavily militarized and aware of war trauma; second, that *Philoctetes* and *Ajax* effectively portray the way that war trauma can destroy character and cause isolation: and third, that Athenian drama could provide therapeutic relief through the nature of the theatrical process itself. Taken together, the argument as a whole is that *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were tragedies concerned with the effects of war trauma, and whose production provided relief to Athenian soldiers suffering from trauma caused by the Peloponnesian War.

Symptoms and Definitions

Before discussing this further, it is important to specify here what is meant by "war trauma." It is typical to describe troubled veterans whose symptoms stem from their involvement in a war as suffering from PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), and this term is correct. PTSD, however, is a rather broad term. The most up-to-date Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders categorizes the stressors as "Exposure to

actual death, serious injury, or sexual violence", as it happens to the person themselves, or in a situation where they would be witness to it, learn that it happened to someone close, or in which they would be repeatedly exposed to details of such death, injury, or sexual violence. The DSM-V then gives a wide variety of symptoms that could manifest after the occurrence of the stressor (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)). PTSD applies to many situations, but for the sake of this work, the term will be limited to trauma caused by war, as this is the trauma on which the two Sophoclean tragedies focus. Shay also argues that a primary trigger for PTSD is the "betrayal of what's right", and this is a prominent factor in the events of both plays. In the *Iliad*, Shay calls Agamemnon's seizure of Achilles' war prize "the betrayal of what is right", and argues that this causes the shrinkage of Achilles' "social horizon" (Shay 1994, xx). Likewise, in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, the betrayals at the hands of the *Atreidae* and Odysseus which the titular characters experience trigger the same symptom. Shay also notes that in modern veterans, he has noted the betrayal at the hands of one's commanders as a common theme in modern veterans' narratives of the berserk state (Shay 1994, 80). Though the berserk state is absent in *Philoctetes*, it will be important to define it here as it maintains a strong presence in *Ajax*.

Shay defines the berserk state generally as a rage-fueled state of mind in which the affected combatant attacks his perceived enemies without restraint, and uses Achilles' rampage in Book 20 of the *Iliad* as an ancient example of this (Shay 1994, 84-85). When examining Ajax's madness in the *Ajax* it is important to keep in mind some of the characteristics which Shay attributes to the berserker. He lists the characteristics as the following: "beastlike", "godlike", "socially disconnected", "crazy, mad, insane",

"enraged", "cruel, without restraint or discrimination", "insatiable", "devoid of fear", "inattentive to own safety", "distractible", "indiscriminate", "reckless, feeling invulnerable", "exalted, intoxicated, frenzied", "cold, indifferent", "insensible to pain", and "suspicious of friends" (Shay 1994, 82). These all apply to Ajax at some point in either the *Iliad* or *Ajax*.[2]

The way trauma ruins a soldier's character is portrayed prominently in *Philoctetes*. Shay claims that "prolonged combat can wreck the personality", and lists the results of this damage as the veteran's expression of "a hostile or mistrustful attitude toward the world", "social withdrawal", "feelings of emptiness or hopelessness", "a chronic feeling of being 'on the edge,' as if constantly threatened", and "estrangement" (Shay 1994, 169). Philoctetes expresses his hopelessness in his belief that his father is surely long dead; he is "on the edge" in that he always holds onto his bow, ready to defend himself at any time; and he is estranged, socially withdrawn, and hostile through the central conflict of the play—his adamant refusal to rejoin the Greek army. Most significant in the play, however, is the picture of pure isolation which Sophocles paints. A description of the isolated nature of the island on which he has been abandoned is given as a metaphor for Philoctetes' own isolation. Once he appears on stage, his lines show his desperate attempts to avoid any further isolation by reaching out to Neoptolemus. Judith Herman, a psychiatrist renowned for her contributions to the field of research on PTSD, comments on the nature of the vulnerable victim of trauma: "The survivor who is often in terror of being left alone craves the simple presence of a sympathetic person. Having once experienced the sense of total isolation, the survivor is

[2] See Chapter Two.

intensely aware of the fragility of all human connections in the face of danger. She needs clear and explicit assurances that she will not be abandoned again" (Herman 1992, 61-62). In Chapter Three, we will see that Philoctetes hopes for exactly these same assurances in his entreaties to Neoptolemus. Other symptoms which are not portrayed to any meaningful degree in either play, but which appear in other ancient Greek texts, will be defined in Chapter One.

Chapters and Methods

The first chapter's purpose is twofold. First, it will establish that war trauma symptoms had been observed in the ancient Greek world by the time that *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were produced, and show that hoplite combat was brutal and traumatic enough to have caused these symptoms.[3] Second, it will give the historical context of the two plays which establishes that they were produced in a violent period of Athenian history, which would imply that Athens' male citizens would have seen a considerable amount of combat. Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War is the most valuable source for the latter. For the cataloguing of trauma symptoms in ancient Greece, I will use a variety of sources (including Thucydides, Herodotus, Gorgias and others) and compare them to modern scholarship and accounts of trauma symptoms, using anecdotes from modern war veterans when relevant.

The second chapter will focus on Sophocles' *Ajax*, which was produced earlier than *Philoctetes*. Its goal is to establish that the play can be read as a story of war trauma which could resonate with the Athenian audience, an audience which had been

[3] Of course, it is impossible to find an ancient source which clearly catalogues psychological symptoms and labels the cause as trauma. Instead, my method will be to find actions and effects (such as Epizelos' blindness) in ancient sources which are congruent with modern PTSD symptoms and are clearly caused by the person's involvement in war.

increasingly involved in conflict with other Greek states (as established in Chapter One). The play works effectively as a portrait of a traumatized warrior in three ways. First, it characterizes Ajax's "madness" as a state of mind similar to the "berserk state".[4] Second, it portrays Ajax after his madness as someone who is growing isolated from his former community because of his obsession with his betrayal at the hands of the Greek commanders. This betrayal which does not reflect the honor which he thinks he deserves based on his combat prowess. This correlates with Shay's belief that the social space of a soldier decreases based on the betrayals he experiences (Shay 1994, 24). Finally, through Ajax's suicide, the play shows that this isolation, combined with betrayal and the inability to adapt to a change in social environment, can lead to self-destruction.[5] The main primary source for this chapter is naturally *Ajax* itself, with Tim O'Brien's war memoir collection, *The Things they Carried*, being used as a modern primary source for comparison.[6]

The third chapter is a treatment of *Philoctetes* which corresponds with Chapter Two's treatment of *Ajax*. Its argument is that the play is a piece which outlines the distress and isolation felt by the soldier who has been betrayed (for Philoctetes, this betrayal is his abandonment on Lemnos), and how he may be healed afterwards. The play shows this in three major ways. First, by showing the absolute desolation which his illness and isolated environment created for him, it casts Philoctetes as an extremely

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[4] See definition on pages 3-4.

[5] For the modern veteran, this "change in social environment" is their return to the civilian world after living in the world of battle (see, for example, the struggles of soldiers to do so as outlined in Shay 2002)—for Ajax, this change is the transition to a non-heroic world, in which he must submit to authority.

[6] Whether or not the events portrayed in *The Things they Carried* can be taken as factual is up for debate, as O'Brien himself admits in the book that parts of the stories may not have actually happened. More importantly, however, it was written to portray "true war stories", unromanticised accounts of the suffering of soldiers in Vietnam. Other scholars have also used *The Things they Carried* as a comparative work: See Herman 1992, 38 and Tritle 2000, 187.

vulnerable individual who desperately needs companionship and understanding (which is exactly how Herman characterized traumatized individuals. See pages 4-5). Second, it emphasizes the emotional distress this causes him, and how he then has a hostile outlook on the world. Finally, it shows that healing can only come through mutual understanding and Philoctetes' closure with his dead companion.

The fourth chapter examines the Athenian theater itself—its staging, its audience, and the processes which occur in the theater—and argues that Athenian theatergoing had a therapeutic benefit. The chapter's support for this argument is based in a comparative approach. First, it compares Athenian theater to the modern therapeutic technique of psychodrama, and especially focuses on how the "sharing" stage of psychodrama benefits its participants in the same way that *katharsis* (as Aristotle explained it) did for the audience of Athenian tragedy. Second, it shows that the theater's staging of plays in the world of mythology allowed it to address issues that were distressing to the Athenians from a safe distance. It compares this to the modern technique of dramatherapy, which encourages the use of play and metaphor as methods of expressing stressful issues. Finally, it shows the effects which the *Theater of War* productions have had on modern veterans. Through that comparison, it is possible to imagine how the plays would have affected their original audiences.

Overview of Sources

The main primary sources used in this work are Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, but there are a few other ancient Greek sources which are essential to the argument of this work—that is, that the two plays can be read allegories for the effects of war trauma, and that their staging had a therapeutic benefit on the Athenian audience which was

increasingly faced with combat. Thucydides is a necessary source for understanding the historical context of the plays and the nature of Peloponnesian War. Herodotus as well gives insight into prior Greek warfare. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are used to show the mythological context of the two plays, especially where the nature of Achilles, Odysseus, and the *Atreidae* are concerned. Other helpful authors include Dio Chrysostom for his descriptions of the other versions of *Philoctetes,* and Aristotle for his explanation of the purpose of ancient Greek tragedy. O'Brien's *The Things they Carried* is the main primary source used for modern accounts of war trauma.

Secondary sources on ancient Greek works include the Thucydidean scholarship by De Ste. Croix, Pouncey, Price and Rawlings. Scholars whose works on *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* are cited in this work include Knox, Musurillo, Jebb and Poe. Austin and Worman's works on *Philoctetes* are also invaluable, especially regarding their contributions to the understanding of the role of his disease in the play. Meagher's essay on *Heracles Gone Mad* is used as a basis for approaching ancient Greek tragedy from the lens of war trauma which Shay used for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

As far as secondary scholarship on PTSD and its treatment is concerned, Shay's works are absolutely essential. Also cited throughout this work are Herman, whose revolutionary work on the trauma of war and rape survivors was used by Shay throughout his own works, and Tritle, who applied Shay's methods to the broader ancient Greek world. Lt. Col. Grossman' *On Killing* is also cited throughout, as it outlines the psychology of killing, showing both what enables a soldier to kill, and the after-effects of that killing. Wilkins' work is used to explain the uses of psychodrama, and the

dramatherapy works of Johnson and Madan are used to show how dramatherapy is used for people who suffer from war trauma.

Chapter One: The Rise of Athenian Warfare and Trauma

Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were not written in a vacuum. The emotions that coursed through Ajax as he slew the flocks he thought to be Argives, and Philoctetes' distress upon realizing his betrayal—both of these reflect the atmosphere of Athens at the time. Scholarship of ancient Greek tragedy has often explored the possible existence of a political or philosophical message in each of the great tragedians' plays, and it often finds the messages embedded in the roles which the characters of each play represent. For example, Euripides' *Trojan Women* is often considered a piece which attempts to address the Athenians' killing of the Melians.[7] Even a character as old as Odysseus represents a certain theme in the context of tragedy. Bernard Knox, for instance, says that, "In the last years of the Peloponnesian war the Homeric hero [Odysseus] appears often in the plays of Euripides as a type of the new political extremists, who, armed with sophistic rhetoric, dominated the Athenian assembly with their ferocious policies of repression and aggrandizement" (Knox 1964, 124). In a similar vein, I argue that the Athenian theatre audience understood the characters of Ajax and Philoctetes in the corresponding plays of Sophocles to represent the psychologically wounded soldier.

In this chapter, I will establish that the ancient Athenians had awareness and experience of war trauma symptoms, and that *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were produced during a period of heavy violence and militarization, which would have made these symptoms more noticeable among the Athenian population. Three methods will be used to support

[7] For more on this, and other examples of political allegories in ancient Athenian drama, see Meagher 2006, 5.

this. First, an examination will be made into ancient Greek works which discuss the effects of stress in wartime. This will reveal correlations between these effects and modern trauma symptoms. Second, a discussion of ancient Greek warfare—hoplite warfare in particular—will reveal that Greek soldiers were often involved in direct, brutal combat, which could have led to shock and trauma. Finally, an outline of some of the most destructive events of the Peloponnesian War will show that the time period in which *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were produced was a time of increasing militarization and violence in Greece.

Trauma Symptoms

Before I show the ancient Greek evidence for war trauma symptoms, I will include here a brief overview of the modern trauma symptoms which correspond to them. Some, such as the "berserk state", the isolated nature of the trauma victim, and the way that trauma destroys character have been defined in the introduction, and are relevant to the plays under discussion.[8] Other symptoms and effects of trauma also appear in ancient Greek evidence, but are not portrayed in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.

"Conversion disorder" is a symptom which can be caused by trauma. This symptom, which was first documented by Freud, was originally called "hysteria" (Herman 1992, 5). The symptom manifests itself as a neurological abnormality, such as blindness or paralysis, whose origin cannot be explained through physiological means, and generally has a psychological, traumatic origin (Weinstein 1995, 385).[9]

[8] See page 2ff.

[9] The DSM-V notes that the disorder's co-occurrence with PTSD therefore marks it as a symptom of the larger disorder, rather than a separate, self-contained disorder (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)).

Other symptoms of trauma include intrusive memories of the event. An intrusive memory is a recollection of the event which is involuntarily recalled by the survivor of trauma (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)). This symptom will be discussed with reference to Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*.[10]

Three sources which give evidence for the existence of war trauma are the *Iliad*, Herodotus' *Histories*, and Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*. The evidence from the *Iliad* is the focus of Shay's work. *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America* contain a vast number of examples to draw from, but only the nature of Achilles' *ἀριστεία* (excellence) will be discussed here. Near the end of the *Iliad*, after Patroclus dies, Achilles sets out against the Trojans and engages in fierce combat with Hector. Before their fight begins, Hector makes a plea that both of them treat the corpse of whoever dies with respect, but Achilles, in his grief, replies,

> *Ἕκτορ μή μοι ἄλαστε συνημοσύνας ἀγόρευε:*
> *ὡς οὐκ ἔστι λέουσι καὶ ἀνδράσιν ὅρκια πιστά,*
> *οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν,*
> *ἀλλὰ κακὰ φρονέουσι διαμπερὲς ἀλλήλοισιν,*
> *ὣς οὐκ ἔστ' ἐμὲ καὶ σὲ φιλήμεναι, οὐδέ τι νῶϊν*
> *ὅρκια ἔσσονται, πρίν γ' ἢ ἕτερόν γε πεσόντα*
> *αἵματος ἆσαι Ἄρηα ταλαύρινον πολεμιστήν.*
>
> *Hector, do not speak to me of agreements, wretch:*
> *Faithful oaths do not exist between lions and men,*
> *Wolves and sheep do not have a heart that agrees,*
> *But through and through they think of terrible things for each other,*
> *And so it is not possible for you and I to be kind to one another,*
> *Nor will oaths exist in any way in our two minds before one falls*
> *And gives Ares, the warrior with the bull's hide shield, his fill of blood* (*Iliad* 22.261-267).

Shay sees the comparison of Achilles with lions and wolves as an indicator of his transition into the berserk state, and draws comparisons between him and modern war

[10] See page 15ff.

veterans who also described themselves in animalistic terms when they performed their heaviest attacks in combat (Shay 1994, 83). The comparisons between soldiers and predatory animals have been made in modern times as well. Lt. Col. Grossman shares an opinion from a war veteran who believes that people have different degrees of natural temperaments which categorize them in a hierarchy as "wolves", "dogs", or "sheep" (Grossman 1995, 183). Grossman relates this categorization to the concept of Jungian archetypes, and that Jung would consider the "wolves" in this hierarchy to be the same as what we know as "warriors" or "heroes" (Grossman 1995, 184). Regardless, in the case of Achilles, it is the trauma of losing a dear comrade on the battlefield which makes his status as a wolf, lion, or hero so pronounced in the epic. Grossman agrees that revenge for losing a comrade is a common effect of that trauma, and says "Revenge killing during a burst of rage has been a recurring theme throughout history, and it needs to be considered in the overall equation of factors that enable killing on the battlefield" (Grossman 1995, 179). Thus Homer shows how, even at one of the earliest points in ancient Greek history, trauma manifests itself through the vengeful wrath of Achilles.[11]

Another poignant example of a trauma symptom is found in Herodotus' account of the Athenian warrior, Epizelos. The account begins thusly: "*Ἀθηναῖον ἄνδρα Ἐπίζηλον τὸν Κουφαγόρεω ἐν τῇ συστάσι μαχόμενόν τε καὶ ἄνδρα γινόμενον ἀγαθὸν τῶν ὀμμάτων στερηθῆναι οὔτε πληγέντα οὐδὲν τοῦ σώματος οὔτε βληθέντα, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν τῆς ζόης διατελέειν ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ χρόνου ἐόντα τυφλόν*" (*The Athenian man Epizelos, the son of Kouphagoras, both a fighter and a good man in the conflict, was robbed of his eyesight though nothing struck his body and nothing was cast at him, and he spent the remainder*

[11] See also Herman 1992, 189, in which she details how the revenge fantasy is a common maladaptive coping mechanism in survivors of trauma.

of his life from that point on being blind. Histories 6.117). Herodotus goes on further to explain the context of this mysterious event, and the result is a striking picture of an extreme effect of trauma in combat: "*λέγειν δὲ αὐτὸν περὶ τοῦ πάθεος ἤκουσα τοιόνδε τινὰ λόγον, ἄνδρα οἱ δοκέειν ὁπλίτην ἀντιστῆναι μέγαν, τοῦ τὸ γένειον τὴν ἀσπίδα πᾶσαν σκιάζειν: τὸ δὲ φάσμα τοῦτο ἑωυτὸν μὲν παρεξελθεῖν, τὸν δὲ ἑωυτοῦ παραστάτην ἀποκτεῖναι*" (*I heard that he says this certain sort of story about the event, that a great, heavily-armored man seemed to stand before him, whose beard overshadowed his entire shield: this phantom passed him by, but slew the man standing beside him. Histories* 6.117). The death of Epizelos' comrade appears to have caused the aforementioned symptom which resembles conversion disorder.

One may argue against the reliability of Epizelos' story based on the amount of ancient Greek hoplite battle accounts which include fantastic and supernatural elements. Victor Davis Hanson, for instance, points out that "In nearly every Greek battle we hear of epiphanies, stories of gods and heroes who at a certain moment descend to fight alongside a particular contingent" (Hanson 1989, 192). Hence one might include this account among these epiphanies, but even Hanson counts the story of Epizelos among the evidence for battle shock in hoplite combat (Hanson 1989, 193). Tritle also sees this as evidence for traumatic symptoms in ancient Greek times (Tritle 2000, 64), and similar accounts from modern war veterans cannot be neglected, either. Weinstein, for instance, gives this summary of sodium amytal-induced recollections of traumatic events in the World War II era: "Recollections might be highly melodramatic with a mixture of fact and fantasy. In a case treated by the author at the U.S. Army's 601st Clearing Company in Italy, the patient who had become dramatically blind 'recalled' how he had been

searching for his brother among the dead and wounded. He later admitted that his actual brother was safe in the United States" (Weinstein 1995, 391). Epizelos' story likewise may have dramatic elements, but the face of his blindness would be undeniable to those who heard the story from him personally. There was clearly some element in his battle which induced conversion blindness in him.

Finally, Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* gives a viewpoint on the symptoms of war trauma during the Peloponnesian War. The purpose of his work is to demonstrate how, through seeing Paris and falling in love with him, Helen's actions were logical. He uses a comparison to how seeing enemies on the battlefield during war affects the mind in a similar manner, and says,

> *αὐτίκα γὰρ ὅταν πολέμια σώματα [καὶ] πολέμιον ἐπὶ πολεμίοις ὁπλίσῃ κόσμον χαλκοῦ καὶ σιδήρου, τοῦ μὲν ἀλεξητήριον τοῦ δὲ προβλήματα, εἰ θεάσεται ἡ ὄψις, ἐταράχθη καὶ ἐτάραξε τὴν ψυχήν, ὥστε πολλάκις κινδύνου τοῦ μέλλοντος <ὡς> ὄντος φεύγουσιν ἐκπλαγέντες. ἰσχυρὰ γὰρ ἡ συνήθεια τοῦ νόμου διὰ τὸν φόβον ἐξῳκίσθη τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως, ἥτις ἐλθοῦσα ἐποίησεν ἀμελῆσαι καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ τοῦ διὰ τὸν νόμον κρινομένου καὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ διὰ τὴν νίκην γινομένου. ἤδη δέ τινες ἰδόντες φοβερὰ καὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἐν τῷ παρόντι χρόνῳ φρονήματος ἐξέστησαν· οὕτως ἀπέσβεσε καὶ ἐξήλασεν ὁ φόβος τὸ νόημα. πολλοὶ δὲ ματαίοις πόνοις καὶ δειναῖς νόσοις καὶ δυσιάτοις μανίαις περιέπεσον· οὕτως εἰκόνας τῶν ὁρωμένων πραγμάτων ἡ ὄψις ἐνέγραψεν ἐν τῷ φρονήματι. καὶ τὰ μὲν δειματοῦντα πολλὰ μὲν παραλείπεται, ὅμοια δ' ἐστὶ τὰ παραλειπόμενα οἷάπερ <τὰ> λεγόμενα.*

> *For example, thus whenever enemy bodies also get ready for the battles a battle line of bronze and of iron, one for attack, the other for defense, if a sight looks upon them, they are troubled, and it troubles their soul, so that often they flee the oncoming danger as if they are awestruck. For the strong discipline of the law is booted out on account of the fear of the sight, which when it arrives makes them care nothing of what has been judged good according to the law and what is good for the sake of victory. Some men, having seen fearful things, soon throw off their present mind at the present time. Thus fear extinguishes and drives out custom. Many men then fall upon idle labors, terrible illnesses, and hard to cure insanities. Thus the sight engraves images in the mind of the things which were seen. Many terrifying things remain, and those things which remain are the same as the sorts of things which were spoken* (*Encomium of Helen* 16-17).

Part of this passage likely refers to soldiers' actions during combat itself. Flight out of fear would have had a profound effect on the army. As the effectiveness of hoplite ranks depended on keeping formation, running from battle would have caused chaos.[12] In Sparta, for example, those who fled from battle would be labeled with the shameful title of "*τρέσαντες*" (*runaways*) (Hanson 1989, 103). Even more extreme examples of "the present mind being thrown off at the present time" are given by Hanson, who cites examples from Xenophon, Plutarch, and Aristophanes in which hoplite soldiers lost control of their bodily functions shortly before colliding with an opposing phalanx (Hanson 1989, 102).

Perhaps more relevant, however, are the examples Gorgias gives which affect soldiers after the war. He mentions "hard to cure illnesses", "terrible insanities", and how combat "engraves images in the mind of things which were seen."[13] His language is too vague to make a definite conclusion, but the latter two comments may be referring to intrusive memories. As far as "hard to cure illnesses" are concerned, there is evidence to support that these "illnesses" could be effects of trauma. The story of Epizelos and his blindness, for example, is an extreme version of this, but research has shown that somatic symptoms can appear in more subtle ways than this.[14] Van Zelst and Beekman show the prevalence of these somatic symptoms in their research on PTSD: "Older persons have more somatic complaints, which they express more readily and which may mask existing

[12] See Hanson 1989, 97 on how panic and fear could cause collapses in hoplite formations.

[13] Gorgias' reference to "idle labors" is strange. It is difficult to say what he means by "idle" in this passage, and thus is hard to qualify as a trauma symptom. See Shay 2002, 57 for modern veteran accounts of how "workaholism" is manifested as a trauma symptom, which is possibly what Gorgias is referencing here.

[14] By "somatic symptoms", here I mean physical symptoms which are less extreme than those experienced in conversion disorder. The DSM-V gives "dizziness, shortness of breath," and "heat sensations" as examples of such somatic symptoms, but cautions that somatic symptoms can range widely, especially from culture-to-culture (DSM-V, 309.81 (F43.10)).

PTSD symptoms. To overcome this problem in assessment, somatic complaints should be phrased in terms of the physical consequences of tension and burdensome thoughts concerning traumatic events" (Van Zelst and Beekman 2012, 283). It is also possible for these symptoms to appear as an indirect result of trauma stress. In a study of the spouses or significant others of those who suffer from PTSD, Fullerton and Ursano found that stress could lead to negative changes in health behaviors (Fullerton and Ursano 1997, 70), and that veterans with PTSD were more likely to partake in alcohol and drug abuse than other veterans (Fullerton and Ursano 1997, 71). Moreover, they noted that "Another mechanism for disturbed health in disaster worker SSOs [spouses and significant others] may be their own PTSD. In a 2-year follow-up of 51 rape victims, Waigandt et al. (1990) found significant differences between victims and matched control subjects in current illness symptoms (e.g., high or low blood pressure, severe colds, headaches, stomach pains) measured by the Cornell Medical Index Health Questionnaire. Similarly, the relationship of PTSD and health in caregivers may be mediated by health behaviors" (Fullerton and Ursano 1997, 71).

With all of these correlations between Gorgias' account and modern knowledge about trauma symptoms, his work appears as clear evidence for trauma awareness in the period of the Peloponnesian War. Tritle sees the work as such, and says, "It reveals a connection between going into battle, seeing horrific things, and how this affects the soul and changes the man—something that today is defined as post-traumatic stress disorder" (Tritle 2013, 281). This account, combined with what Homer and Herodotus have given, makes it clear that trauma symptoms had been observed and recorded by the ancient Greeks.

The nature of hoplite combat

To make sense of these trauma symptoms, it is necessary to demonstrate that ancient Greek warfare by nature enabled the type of environment which created combat trauma. The modern portrayals of traumatic events bring to mind images of mortar blasts, chemical warfare, and grenade explosions--elements which were all absent in ancient Greek times. A thorough examination into hoplite warfare will show that, contrary to what one may expect in comparison to modern warfare, their style of warfare created an environment which contained brutal fighting that could cause trauma. This is demonstrated in three ways. First, the spatial aspect of hoplite warfare caused Greek soldiers to have close, violent encounters with their enemies while being pressured to fight by their sense of camaraderie with their fellow soldiers. Second, the battlefield was chaotic and violent enough that even at the time, secondary injuries and friendly "fire" were concerns for the armies. Finally, there is evidence in ancient Greek works of hoplites experiencing stress to the point of being driven to suicide.

The formation of hoplite soldiers contributes to a combat atmosphere which enables traumatic events to occur. The mechanics of their warfare—using one's shield to protect the companion to your left—made the soldiers focus their values on the importance of community, family, and camaraderie. Rawlings says, "Hoplite cohesion did not rely so much on the ability of officers to discipline their men, but on the moral pressure from comrades in arms, who were often neighbors and relatives, and from a regard for the wider attitude of the community to those who acted in a cowardly or shameful manner in combat" (Rawlings 2013, 21). This indicates that hoplites fight for

each other; social pressure is part of what pushes them into combat. Shay indicates that this is paralleled in modern combat as well: "Men fight mainly for their comrades; this has become conventional wisdom even among civilians" (Shay 1994, 23). Noteworthy to the matter of how space affects trauma is the fact that physical distance from the enemy plays a part in the trauma caused from killing. Grossman notes that "the vast majority of personal kills and the resultant trauma" occur at close range (Grossman 1995, 115). Hence, while individual cases may vary, close-combat, such as that of the Greek hoplite soldiers, or a more modern soldier using his bayonet, can more easily cause trauma.[15]

The social space of hoplite combat could also harm the psyche of the soldier, under certain circumstances. The close-quartered nature of hoplite warfare means that the Greek soldiers would likely have had a strong social connection with each other during their battles. Evidence shows that relatives and friends fought alongside each other for a more effective incentive to fight, and Hanson says that "These uncommonly strong bonds among hoplites were merely the normal relationships of nearly all fighters in the phalanxes of most Greek city-states; they do not presuppose any unusual specialized training or concerted effort to form an elite corps" (Hanson 1989, 124). For an even more extreme example, Hanson cites the Sacred Band of Thebes, a unit comprised of 150 homosexual couples who all fought and died together over a period of 50 years (Hanson 1989, 124-125).

[15] Grossman notes that bayonet attacks are rare. This is due not only to a soldier's psychological resistance to close-range combat, but also to their resistance to use piercing weapons when forced into close-range combat. At this range, soldiers were more likely to use the ends of their rifles as clubs rather than use the bayonet, and Grossman draws the comparison to the ancient Roman tendency to cut, rather than pierce with their swords (Grossman 1995, 121-122). For the Greek hoplite, however, stabbing with a spear is the typical form of attack, and they either use an upward or downward thrust to aim around the enemy's shield (Hanson 1989, 84). One might then come to the conclusion that hoplite combat was rather difficult from a psychological standpoint, based on how difficult it was for modern soldiers to perform piercing attacks.

With this increase in bonding between soldiers, the fighting efficiency of each individual increases with their need to protect one another. As Shay said, it is conventionally accepted that soldiers fight for their comrades (Shay 1994, 23). This also means greater psychological trauma when a soldier loses one of those comrades, however. It is hardly surprising, for instance, that all of the members of the Sacred Band died together, as one man's partner was always at his side. The loss of a comrade in war can cause soldiers to fearlessly seek out revenge. Shay gives accounts from modern veterans who felt this same feeling after seeing their comrades die. This one shared his feelings after finding only the hair of his comrade who had been killed in combat: "I cried and I cried and I cried….And I stopped crying. And I probably didn't cry again for twenty years. I turned. I had no feelings. I wanted to hurt. I wanted to hurt. And I wanted to hurt" (Shay 1994, 96). Being in the war, he had the opportunity for revenge, as Achilles did for Patroclus' death in the *Iliad*. When there is no opportunity for revenge, however, there may be only despair and a feeling of guilt for letting down their comrades. Lazenby believes that this was the same for both ancient Greek hoplites and modern soldiers: "What modern research has shown about today's soldiers, was probably also true of those of ancient Greece—that it was mainly not wanting to 'let one's mates down' which kept them from shirking, though the evidence largely concerns the Spartans. Thus one suspects that the reason for the suicide of the sole Spartan survivor from the so-called 'Battle of the Champions', was not just the fear that his mere survival might cast doubt on his courage, but also the thought of being left alive when all his comrades had perished" (Lazenby 1991, 106-107). This trauma caused by the loss of one's comrades was certainly enhanced by the nature of the traditions of hoplite combat.

Turning attention away from the formations of the hoplites, the battlefield during actual combat was violent to a degree which may be surprising considering the relative difference in the technology of battle between a war such as the Peloponnesian War, and one such as the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, hoplite encounters involved a great amount of close-quarters combat, which, as established earlier, is difficult for the mind to handle.[16] Furthermore, it needs to be considered that there were risks on the hoplite battlefield which have died down in more recent wars. For example, it was not unusual for hoplites with only minor wounds to eventually die after leaving the battlefield due to infections. Hanson says, "Most hoplite weapons were good collectors of bacteria commonly found in the soil and animal feces on the ground, specifically clostridial infections such as tetanus or gas gangrene—diseases that arise even from superficial injury where initial blood loss may have been managed. In most such instances, death was inevitable given the absence of an appropriate antibiotic or antitoxin" (Hanson 1989, 217-218). Due to the smaller availability of treatments and sanitation in ancient warfare, infection was more common during the ancient Greek wars. Thus, after the chaos of the battle, one hoplite may be relieved by the fact that his comrade survived, but then would be brought down to the level of trauma illustrated previously by the fact that he then succumbed to disease.

Worst of all for soldiers and hoplites alike is the way that the chaos of the battlefield allows "friendly fire." Shay outlines how this can be the ultimate betrayal of trust, that those upon whom a soldier depends would ultimately cause his death.[17] He

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[16] See page 19.

[17] Betrayal is a crucial element in trauma. Shay refers to the betrayal of "what's right" throughout his work as a trigger of trauma in both Homer and the accounts of modern veterans (Shay 1994). The effects of betrayal will also be explored especially in Chapter Three, when *Philoctetes* is the focus. See page 61.

also notes that, while it is not an unusual phenomenon to be found in the Vietnam War (and, in fact, that there are estimates that up to 15 or 20 percent of American deaths in that war were caused by "friendly fire"), this element of war is conspicuously absent in Homer (Shay 1994, 125). It is not, however, absent from hoplite warfare. Hanson rightly shows that hoplite battles were between groups of people who spoke, dressed, and looked alike (Hanson 1989, 186). Thucydides gives the chaotic result of this confusing element in the Athenians' battle at Epipolae: "*ὥστε τέλος ξυμπεσόντες αὐτοῖς κατὰ πολλὰ τοῦ στρατοπέδου, ἐπεὶ ἅπαξ ἐταράχθησαν, φίλοι τε φίλοις καὶ πολῖται πολίταις, οὐ μόνον ἐς φόβον κατέστησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐς χεῖρας ἀλλήλοις ἐλθόντες μόλις ἀπελύοντο*" (*Thus, when they at once were in disorder, they were in the end clashing amongst themselves in many parts of the army, friends amongst friends and citizens among citizens—not only did they bring fear amongst themselves, but having gone into each other's hands* [hand-to-hand combat], *they were parted with difficulty*. *History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.44.7). Thucydides attributes this collapse in large part to the fact that this battle took place during the night, but it is important to take note that friendly fire and accidental kills of one's allies are not only causes for trauma, but also evidence of stress in the first place. Bickers notes that the reasons for these accidents can be due to the terrain, weather, technology, human carelessness, and battle fatigue. He says that "Under stress even experienced surgeons make fatal mistakes, let alone soldiers, sailors and airmen" (Bickers 1994, 150). Thus the stress felt by the Athenian military may have contributed to these accidents' occurrences.

This brings up the final point about hoplite warfare: there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that hoplites were sometimes even driven to suicide. Hanson says, "Signs of

battle shock and depression are seen in random stories of hoplites irrationally exposing themselves to danger or deliberately choosing to die in battle. For example, Xenophon relates that in 365 after Andromachos, commander of the Elean cavalry, led his men in a disastrous attack against the Arcadians, he killed himself on the spot" (Hanson 1989, 193). Furthermore, he explains that for hoplites, "Deliberate exposure in battle was nearly the same as suicide, and on occasion we hear of hoplites who intentionally exposed themselves in such a way as to ensure their own demise. That was the course which the blind Eurytos took at Thermopylai when he ordered his servant to lead him toward the last stand of the Three Hundred" (Hanson 1989, 193). It is practically a given in modern soldiers that stress on the battlefield can lead to suicide, whether the suicide may be on the battlefield, or much later at home. It seems, however, that for Andromachos, for instance, suicide was more akin to "self-execution", as Shay puts it. Shay uses this term to differentiate the suicide born out of guilt for the outcome of events during war, as opposed to suicide out of pure grief. He notes that the soldiers who sought "self-execution" out of their stress did not commit suicide outright, but rather they "Recoiled from the stigma of suicide even as they pronounced a death sentence upon themselves. These sought the honorable compromise of death in battle and went berserk. They neither expected to survive nor wanted to. The few who inexplicably survived returned to civilian life with the double torment of death-deserving guilt and a ready capacity to go berserk" (Shay 1994, 73). Both modern berserk soldiers and the hoplites who were pressured by their sense of honor were driven to suicide or "self-execution."

Violence during the time of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*

So far this evidence has been concerned with Greece in general, throughout the broad time period which can be defined as "ancient Greece." It is also necessary for the traumatic nature of Greek warfare to be placed in the context of Sophocles' productions of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Finding the dates of their productions can help determine what events were contemporary with them, but unfortunately, finding the date of the production of *Ajax* proves to be difficult. Finglass, among others, uses comparative metric data to date the play. His conclusion is that *Ajax* is at least not a late play, but rather can probably be paired with one of the earlier Sophoclean plays, such as *Antigone* or *Trachiniae*. This would put *Ajax* somewhere between the late 450's and the early to mid-430's (Finglass 2011, 10-11). This would mean that it could have been produced anywhere from the beginning of the First Peloponnesian War to the breakdown of the Thirty Years' Peace, around when Thucydides begins the first book of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. *Philoctetes*, on the other hand, can be dated with relative certainty to 409 (Finglass 2011, 2). This would mean that this play was produced near the end of the overall Peloponnesian War—a couple of years after the oligarchic revolution in Athens, but still some time before its ultimate surrender.

With these dates roughly established, I will focus on two major points in the remainder of this chapter. First, Athens had been becoming more militarized during this period—that is, from the earliest possible time of *Ajax*'s production until the time of *Philoctetes*' production. Second, there were in this period a number of events which could induce trauma for a large number of individuals in Athens.

If *Ajax* was produced between the late 450's and the mid 430's, it most likely was produced in the middle of the First Peloponnesian War, and before the onset of the Ten

Years War (De Ste. Croix 1972, 180). Thucydides, however, is strikingly silent on these events contained within the *Pentecontaetia* (the period from 479 until the late 430's), despite his overall expertise on the greater Peloponnesian War. The earliest likely year for *Ajax*'s production, 454, is contemporary with Pericles' expedition in the Corinthian Gulf (De Ste. Croix 1972, 187). Thucydides, in his survey of the *Pentecontaetia* (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.89-117), notes the major events that precede this as Themistocles' construction of the long walls (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.93); Athens' rise as the leader of the Greek allies and the formation of the Delian League (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.96); the siege of Eion (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.98) and the revolt of Thasos (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.100); the war of Ithome and Athens' alliance with Argos (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.102); the wars of Corinth and Aegina against Athens (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.105); and finally the defeat of the Athenian allied force in Egypt by the Persians (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.109). These events may have been indicators of the fifth-century trend which has been called "Athenian imperialism." De Ste. Croix notes that this was necessary due to the nature of the city, however, that their policy of naval imperialism "was not, as so often represented, just naked aggressiveness and greediness (what the Greeks called *pleonexia*)—although doubtless that was present too—but was bound up with the whole Athenian way of life, which in one essential respect was different from that of all other major Greek states: the very large Athenian population of citizens, metics and slaves was fed by imported corn to a far greater extent than that of any other important Greek city" (De Ste. Croix 1972, 46). This designates their militarization

during the fifth century as a necessity, and shows the difficulties that halting their expeditions would have caused.

From the *Pentecontaetia* onward, there was an overall increase in the number of sieges performed in the Greek world partly in due to Greeks, and especially Athenians, overcoming prior difficulties in besieging other cities (Seaman 2013, 643).[18] During the *Pentecontaetia* specifically, at least thirty Greek cities were besieged, and during the war itself, at least one hundred (Seaman 2013, 644). Not all of these were performed by or against Athenians, of course, but they were involved in a considerable number of them, including but not limited to sieges on Methone, Gythium, Boia, Chaeronea, Oeniadae, and Eion (Seaman 2013, 653). It must also be emphasized how Athens' use of its navy required an overall larger involvement of its population in the military. Pseudo-Xenophon's *Athenian Constitution* gives the difference in Athens' military as a reason for its democracy:

> *δικαίως <δοκοῦσιν> αὐτόθι [καὶ] οἱ πένητες καὶ ὁ δῆμος πλέον ἔχειν τῶν γενναίων καὶ τῶν πλουσίων διὰ τόδε, ὅτι ὁ δῆμός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλαύνων τὰς ναῦς καὶ ὁ τὴν δύναμιν περιτιθεὶς τῇ πόλει, καὶ οἱ κυβερνῆται καὶ οἱ κελευσταὶ καὶ οἱ πεντηκόνταρχοι καὶ οἱ πρῳρᾶται καὶ οἱ ναυπηγοί, —οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ τὴν δύναμιν περιτιθέντες τῇ πόλει πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ ὁπλῖται καὶ οἱ γενναῖοι καὶ οἱ χρηστοί.*
>
> *Rightly so do the people and the workers appear to have more than the noble and wealthy according to this reason, that the people are the ones who row the ships and provide power to the city, and the helmsmen, signalmen, fifty-man commanders, look-outs, and shipwrights—these are the men who provide power to the city very much more so than the hoplites, the noble, and the wealthy* (*Athenian Constitution* 1.2).

This does not indicate an absence of hoplite ranks in Athens at this time, but with the need for more able-bodied men to run their ships, Athens employed a greater number of

[18] Seaman cautions that this does not indicate that Greek sieges and siege tactics were only just occurring this recently—that not only did it occur before the fifth century, but also continued through the Hellenestic period (Seaman 2013, 643). The evidence only indicates that sieges were occurring more often during this period of time than otherwise (Seaman 2013, 644).

people in its military by this time, as opposed to relying only on its hoplite armies, which would have been made up of mostly upper-class individuals.[19] Therefore this aspect of their military also indicated more people as a whole being involved in the military.

Finally, I would like to show some of the violence which would have caused trauma during the period of the Peloponnesian War by examining events which caused many deaths, or caused great amounts of upheaval in people's lives. These events include the Samian War, the Athenian plague, the uprising (*stasis*) of Corcyra, the disaster of the Sicilian expedition, and the Athenians' policies on Mytilene and Melos (as compared to the destruction of Mycalessus by their Thracian allies). The Samian War was the earliest of these, in 440, and thus may have been contemporary with the production of *Ajax*. It is of special interest when considering the emotional states of individual Greek soldiers at the time. The following anecdote from Plutarch shows tensions between Athens and other states were rising by this point: "*οἱ δὲ Σάμιοι τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἀνθυβρίζοντες ἔστιζον εἰς τὸ μέτωπον γλαῦκας· καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνους οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι σάμαιναν*" (*The Samians, abusing the Athenian prisoners in turn, branded owls on their foreheads: for the Athenians also marked them. Pericles* 26.3). There is no testimony from these prisoners which allow us to deduce if they themselves felt any trauma, but Plutarch's use of the word "*ἀνθυβρίζοντες*", and the fact that he chose to include this anecdote at all indicates that this was not typical treatment for prisoners of war. The traumatic effect that it would have had on both the Athenian and Samian prisoners is not difficult to see, and a modern parallel can shed some further light on this. A study in the persistence of PTSD in prisoners of war found the lifetime prevalence of PTSD according to physician

[19] See, for instance, the tendency in Athenian writers (especially in the late 470's) to glorify the battle of Marathon rather than the battle of Salamis, partly because it was a hoplite victory, rather than a naval victory. Because of this, the upper classes could take credit for it (De Ste. Croix 1972, 184-185).

diagnosis in prisoners of war in Pacific theater of WWII, the European theatre of WWII, and the Korean conflict to be 41%, 23%, and 39%, respectively. This differed significantly from its prevalence among the control subjects (i.e., non-prisoners of war), whose prevalence rates corresponded as 4%, 11%, and 12% (Page, Engdahl, and Eberly 1997, 151 [Figure 8-2]). This study finds that the violence and humiliation experienced in war prisons do contribute to the onset of PTSD. Similar degrees of stress may have accompanied the Samian and Athenian prisoners, which would have increased awareness of trauma in Athens as a whole.

After the first year of the war itself, Thucydides documents a terrible plague that swept over Athens. At the beginning of his account, he claims, "*οὐ μέντοι τοσοῦτός γε λοιμὸς οὐδὲ φθορὰ οὕτως ἀνθρώπων οὐδαμοῦ ἐμνημονεύετο γενέσθαι*" (*Not indeed was such death and destruction of men recalled to have happened anywhere else thusly. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.47.3). Thucydides highlights the extreme severity of the disease when he says, "*γενόμενον γὰρ κρεῖσσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου τά τε ἄλλα χαλεπωτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν προσέπιπτεν*" (*The appearance of the disease was mightier than words and in other ways it fell rather harshly against human nature. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.50.1). The disease was unlike any other seen before in the city. While this is not a violent event caused by the war directly, by adding to the stress of the war, it brought moments in which Athenians might be forced to betray or isolate their fellow citizens. Thucydides notes that some individuals did die out of lack of care when he writes, "*ἔθνῃσκον δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀμελείᾳ*" (*Some died out of lack of care. History*

of the Peloponnesian War 2.51.2). Later, when *Philoctetes* is the focus, I will expand upon how this lack of care and betrayal relates to trauma and the play itself.[20]

While this plague certainly caused chaos, perhaps the most chaotic scene which Thucydides provides is found in the civil uprising in Corcyra, which he describes with atypical emotional engagement. The following conclusion to his account sums up the author's feeling about the chaos:

> *καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιώσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθὴς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἀργόν: τὸ δ' ἐμπλήκτως ὀξὺ ἀνδρὸς μοίρᾳ προσετέθη, ἀσφαλείᾳ δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλεύσασθαι ἀποτροπῆς πρόφασις εὔλογος.*
>
> *They even changed the customary meaning of words for the justification for their deeds. For heedless audacity was called courage for one's comrades, but cautious hesitation was specious and cowardly, while moderation was the pretense of a weakling, and all that was intelligent became all that was lazy: startling hastiness was put in esteem of a man, and to plan in safety of betrayal was a cause well-spoken of* (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.82.4).

While the revolt in Corcyra may not immediately seem as if it is reflective of the soldier's psyche in wartime, Thucydides does use it as a blueprint of the way that war causes changes in character. The trauma experienced in wartime manifests itself most clearly when the individuals who were immersed in chaotic situations such as the Corcyrean *stasis* must then rehabilitate themselves in the "peacetime" society. In the peaceful society, killing is looked down upon and consummately punished, but in these chaotic states, it is encouraged.[21]

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[20] See page 65.

[21] There is a strong relationship between these events and what Shay calls "moral luck." This refers to a person's capability for violent and hateful actions manifesting in either a situation where they are regarded as immoral, or a situation where they are regarded as moral. The time of the Corcyrean *stasis* would be the latter, a case where someone who is being violent or traitorous is praised for their actions. They have good "moral luck." Shay cites an account from a veteran who says that in Vietnam he was "just lucky", because there were only soldiers and no civilians where he fought, and so his actions would not be regarded as immoral as they would have been otherwise (Shay 1994, 31).

Thucydides shows that the world had been turned upside-down during this *stasis*. Both this uprising and Vietnam are capable of destroying a person's belief in the trustworthiness of the world, which in turn can destroy one's character. Shay compares this to the trauma felt by an abused child: both the parent and the army have care of the child and the soldier, and betrayal by either endangers their "formation and maintenance of good character" (Shay 1994, 32). He quotes a Vietnam veteran who saw changes in himself: "Why I became like that? It was all evil. All evil. Where before, I wasn't. I look back, I look back today, and I'm horrified at what I turned into. What I was. What I did. I just look at it like it was somebody else. I really do. It was somebody else. Somebody had control of me" (Shay 1994, 33). This description is similar to the one which Thucydides gives to the Corcyrean *stasis*. So that the reader may not think that such destructions of morality and trust only applied to Corcyra, Thucydides notes that these same revolutions occurred throughout Greece, and "*οὕτω πᾶσα ἰδέα κατέστη κακοτροπίας διὰ τὰς στάσεις τῷ Ἑλληνικῷ, καὶ τὸ εὔηθες, οὗ τὸ γενναῖον πλεῖστον μετέχει, καταγελασθὲν ἠφανίσθη.*" (*Thus all the forms of bad character settled in Greece on account of the uprisings, and good-heartedness, which noble character has a part in most of all, was mocked and vanished. History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.83.1). Greece had a loss of character which Thucydides seems to imply as unprecedented. It is worth remembering, however, that the loss of good character in a *polis* also indicates the loss of character in its citizens.

The question that remains is whether or not Thucydides' statement on the destruction of character applies to Athens. The chaos of the Corcyrean *stasis* finds a parallel in a later passage concerning the failure of Athens' expedition against Sicily, one of the most severe losses of Athenian soldiers during the entire war. The passage in its

entirety demonstrates the Athenian army's most desperate moments, and what the trauma and chaos of the combat did to their characters:[22]

> *καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἠπείγοντο πρὸς τὸν Ἀσσίναρον ποταμόν, ἅμα μὲν βιαζόμενοι ὑπὸ τῆς πανταχόθεν προσβολῆς ἱππέων τε πολλῶν καὶ τοῦ ἄλλου ὄχλου, οἰόμενοι ῥᾷόν τι σφίσιν ἔσεσθαι, ἢν διαβῶσι τὸν ποταμόν, ἅμα δ' ὑπὸ τῆς ταλαιπωρίας καὶ τοῦ πιεῖν ἐπιθυμίᾳ. ὡς δὲ γίγνονται ἐπ' αὐτῷ, ἐσπίπτουσιν οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ἔτι, ἀλλὰ πᾶς τέ τις διαβῆναι αὐτὸς πρῶτος βουλόμενος καὶ οἱ πολέμιοι ἐπικείμενοι χαλεπὴν ἤδη τὴν διάβασιν ἐποίουν: ἀθρόοι γὰρ ἀναγκαζόμενοι χωρεῖν ἐπέπιπτόν τε ἀλλήλοις καὶ κατεπάτουν, περί τε τοῖς δορατίοις καὶ σκεύεσιν οἱ μὲν εὐθὺς διεφθείροντο, οἱ δὲ ἐμπαλασσόμενοι κατέρρεον. ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ θάτερά τε τοῦ ποταμοῦ παραστάντες οἱ Συρακόσιοι (ἦν δὲ κρημνῶδες) ἔβαλλον ἄνωθεν τοὺς Ἀθηναίους, πίνοντάς τε τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀσμένους καὶ ἐν κοίλῳ ὄντι τῷ ποταμῷ ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ταρασσομένους. οἵ τε Πελοποννήσιοι ἐπικαταβάντες τοὺς ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ μάλιστα ἔσφαζον. καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ εὐθὺς διέφθαρτο, ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἐπίνετό τε ὁμοῦ τῷ πηλῷ ἡματωμένον καὶ περιμάχητον ἦν τοῖς πολλοῖς.*
>
> *And the Athenians pressed on to the river Assinaros, together being forced by the assault on all sides of both many cavalry and another mob, supposing it would be easy for them were they to cross over the river, under distress and with the desire to drink. As they were upon it, they fell onward, not yet in order, but each person was wanting themselves to cross first, while the enemies lying in wait made the crossing difficult: for crowded together they were forced to draw back, and they fell upon and trampled each other, while some perished surrounded by javelins, and others fell down entangled by baggage. And at the other side of the river, the Syracusans who were standing by (for it was precipitous) threw their javelins towards the Athenians, who were drinking eagerly and were stirred up among themselves in the hollow of the river. The Peloponnesians also came down and slayed them, especially in the river. The water was immediately ruined, but it was drunk no less along with the mud while it was bloodied and was fought for by many* (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.84.2-5).

The chaotic combat and its traumatic effect clearly show the destruction of good morals in this passage. The inclusion of this passage in the account of the war is meant to emphasize needless violence which comes from stress. The actual attacks by the Syracusans and Peloponnesians are underemphasized in comparison to the Athenians' own chaotic tramplings over each other. As a comparison, one can see how the Vietnam War encouraged violence not only by the nature of the war's necessities, but even in the

[22] See page 22 on the chaos of the battle at Epipolae, which was part of this expedition.

basic training of the war. A former marine who fought at Khe Sanh discussed the process of basic training in a rap group: "Boys are turned not into men, but beasts—beasts that will fight and destroy at a moment's notice, without any regard to what they are fighting or why they are fighting, but just fight. I have seen men fight each other over a drink of water when there was plenty for both of them" (Lifton 1973, 140-141).

The most troubling aspect of the violence seen in this example, as well as in Syracuse and Epipolae, is the fact that these violent tendencies persist afterwards. This same veteran said, "When I came back home I was very much antiwar, and yet there was a hostility in me toward other people….If someone irritated me, my first impulse was to kill the fucker" (Lifton 1973, 141). Furthermore, Lifton points out that this is not unique: "Charles Levy, who has done extensive interviewing and 'rapping' with working-class marine veterans, observes that 'the thinking of these veterans seems to be dominated by a fear of their own violence.' Moreover, they were prone to give expression to random violence toward relatives, friends, or strangers" (Lifton 1973, 138). Whether or not the Athenians on the expedition to Sicily felt a persistence of their violence cannot be said; nearly all of them were killed. I would presume, however, that those who were trained to fight in violent hoplite combat would also feel some persistence of that training.

The aforementioned marine who fought at Khe Sanh lost his trust for a country that, through its policy, enabled acts of extreme violence (Lifton 1973, 141). Athens also at the time committed violent acts by its policy. At one time, Athens considered killing all of the men of Mytilene and enslaving the women and children.[23] Thucydides gives this is as their initial decision: "*περὶ δὲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν γνώμας ἐποιοῦντο, καὶ ὑπὸ ὀργῆς*

[23] This type of attack was by no means unprecedented or limited only to Athens' policy. See De Ste. Croix 1972, 21, in which he criticizes Strasburger for using the destruction of Melos, for example, as evidence that the Spartans were more humane towards their defeated enemies than the Athenians.

ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς οὐ τοὺς παρόντας μόνον ἀποκτεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἅπαντας Μυτιληναίους ὅσοι ἡβῶσι, παῖδας δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας ἀνδραποδίσαι" (*They discussed their opinions about the men, and from their anger it seemed best to them not only to kill the ones present* [i.e., the prisoners who were guilty of revolt], *but also all of the Mytileneans who were in their prime, and enslave the women and children. History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.36.2). They backed away from this decision the next day, however, and the ensuing debate reveals that not all Athenians were at the time united on what to do, but both sides did not wish to persuade Athens either for or against killing the Mytileneans out of emotional concerns. Diodotus, who was against killing the Mytileneans, said, "*ὑμεῖς δὲ γνόντες ἀμείνω τάδε εἶναι καὶ μήτε οἴκτῳ πλέον νείμαντες μήτ' ἐπιεικείᾳ, οἷς οὐδὲ ἐγὼ ἐῶ προσάγεσθαι*" (*All of you, consider these to be better* [i.e., policies against killing the Mytileneans], *and do not judge too much out of pity or mercy, by which I should not let you be influenced*. *History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.48.1). This can show that such violence was considered a perfectly legitimate tool. Though they did not kill all the Mytileneans, they did later decide to go through with their decision to kill the men of Melos. Tritle, comparing the destruction of Melos to that of My Lai in Vietnam claims that "It would appear that emotional factors—anger, fear, and stress—were greater inducements to carry out brutal acts of violence than racially or culturally based perceptions of the 'Other'" (Tritle 2000, 123), but this does not seem to really apply to the cases of Mytilene and Melos in Thucydides' account, as the Athenians' actions were based more on policy than emotion, at least according to Thucydides' account of the debate which deterred them from destroying Mytilene.

An event which would be more comparable to what one considers a "war atrocity" would be the massacre at Mycalessus. In this event, a group of Thracians who were allied with Athens attacked Mycalessus, but instead of killing just the men, they were "*καὶ παῖδας καὶ γυναῖκας κτείνοντες, καὶ προσέτι καὶ ὑποζύγια καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἔμψυχα ἴδοιεν*" (*Killing even the children and the women, and even further also the beasts of burden and all other living things they saw. History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.29.4). Thucydides even finishes his description of the massacre by saying, "*καὶ ξυμφορὰ τῇ πόλει πάσῃ οὐδεμιᾶς ἥσσων μᾶλλον ἑτέρας ἀδόκητός τε ἐπέπεσεν αὕτη καὶ δεινή*" (*And the misfortune which hit the entire city was very much both no less unexpected and no less terrible than that of any other city. History of the Peloponnesian War* 7.29.5). Thucydides' language paints this act in particular as excessive violence. The actions of the Thracians at Mycalessus, and—to a lesser extent—the actions of the Athenians at Melos, clash with the condemnatory attitude of Thucydides (an Athenian himself) towards them, and also clash with Athens' decision to spare Mytilene. In fact, one might take from Diodotus' speech which won over the Athenians that they were keenly aware of the effect which atrocity has on the enemy. Diodotus said, "*σκέψασθε γὰρ ὅτι νῦν μέν, ἤν τις καὶ ἀποστᾶσα πόλις γνῷ μὴ περιεσομένη, ἔλθοι ἂν ἐς ξύμβασιν δυνατὴ οὖσα ἔτι τὴν δαπάνην ἀποδοῦναι καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ὑποτελεῖν: ἐκείνως δὲ τίνα οἴεσθε ἥντινα οὐκ ἄμεινον μὲν ἢ νῦν παρασκευάσεσθαι, πολιορκίᾳ δὲ παρατενεῖσθαι ἐς τοὔσχατον, εἰ τὸ αὐτὸ δύναται σχολῇ καὶ ταχὺ ξυμβῆναι;*" (*For consider now that, if some city also revolting knows that it will not succeed, it would come to agreement being still able to pay back the price and pay its tribute: otherwise* [i.e., if they kill all the men of Mytilene], *do you not see that any city whatsoever will prepare itself beforehand better than now, and will hold out to*

the end in a siege, if it is worth the same thing [i.e., death] *to surrender quickly or late? History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.46.2). This line of reasoning has proven true throughout history, that a merciful attitude towards the enemy can weaken their will to continue to fight. Grossman gives a modern parallel:

> *During the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, a German SS unit massacred a group of American POWs at Malmédy. Word of this massacre spread like wildfire through the American forces, and thousands of soldiers resolved never to surrender to the Germans. Conversely, as was mentioned earlier, many Germans who would fight the Russians to their last breath made a point of surrendering to the Americans at the earliest honorable occasion. Those who commit atrocities have burned their bridges behind them and know that they cannot surrender, but even as they have enabled themselves, they have enabled their enemies* (Grossman 1995, 216).

Diodotus was aware of this, as were other Athenians at the time, as evidenced by their decision to abstain from punishing the Mytileneans. Melos, however, indicated some sort of change in Athens' attitude. This contrast with their attitude towards Mytilene shows the Athenians' increasing favor towards violence as the stress of the war went on. Thus the rational decisions to spare cities were gradually usurped by policies in favor of violence during the period of the productions of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.

These were some of the most significant events of the Peloponnesian War which related to trauma. The Athenians were aware of this trauma already through the works of Homer, Herodotus, and Gorgias, which illustrated soldiers who suffered from berserk states, conversion symptoms, and intrusive memories. Like all other militarized Greek states, Athens also had a history of hoplite warfare, through which the Athenians would have had exposure to brutal, traumatic combat. The increasing violence during the Peloponnesian War is evidence that many Athenians would have faced traumatic events multiple times. This needs to be considered in the analysis of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*.

Chapter Two: *Ajax*

Scholars have long criticized Sophocles' *Ajax* as lacklustre due to its faulty structure and repellent characters.[24] Indeed, the characters may appear unlikeable to the modern reader. Athena is merciless to her enemies, Odysseus tricks soldiers into doing what he wants, Tecmessa frets helplessly, and Ajax does not distinguish when violence is appropriate. For these same reasons, however, this story distinguishes itself as a true account of the despair which war inflicts. The idea that war is a glorious undertaking is severely undercut by the unpleasant themes which Sophocles includes in *Ajax*. The play reflects Tim O'Brien's insight about war stories in *The Things They Carried*: "If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie" (O'Brien 68-69).

In this chapter, I will show that *Ajax* presents an accurate depiction of the soldier who has been wounded by the trauma of betrayal at the hands of his commanders. The play illustrates this in three ways. First, it portrays Ajax's "madness" as the "berserk state" which can be triggered in a soldier after grief and betrayal.[25] Second, it reveals that this state causes withdrawal in Ajax not only from the larger community of the Greek army, but also from his personal community embodied in Tecmessa and the chorus. Finally, it causes Ajax to lose the ability to adapt to a new community (one in which he must submit to authority), which results in his suicide. For purposes of my argument, the focus will be on the first half of the text, when Ajax is still alive.

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[24] See Knox 1961, 1 for an overview on some of these criticisms.

[25] See page 3 for the definition of the "berserk state."

Ajax and the berserk state

The play implies Ajax's "madness" to be a manifestation of the berserk state using three methods. First, Sophocles emphasizes the betrayal which Ajax feels at being denied Achilles' armor. This, combined with the pressure to get even with his betrayers, sparks Ajax's desire to kill Odysseus and the *Atreidae*. Second, Ajax's state of madness causes him to kill indiscriminately. Third, his reactions after the event imply that he was in a dissociative state which he did not remember.

When the play begins, the audience is informed of Ajax's grief over his betrayal immediately. Even before Ajax enters the scene, Athena explains to Odysseus the reason why he killed the Greek flocks: "*χόλῳ βαρυνθεὶς τῶν Ἀχιλλείων ὅπλων*" (*He was weighed down by anger over the arms of Achilles. Ajax* 41). Once Ajax appears on stage, his dialogue with Athena reveals that he is trying to reclaim the honor that he lost. She asks if he has attacked the *Atreidae*, and he responds, "*ὥστ' οὔποτ' Αἴανθ' οἵδ' ἀτιμάσουσ' ἔτι*" (*So that they never again dishonor Ajax. Ajax* 98). When she asks for confirmation of their deaths, he responds sarcastically, saying, "*θανόντες ἤδη τἄμ' ἀφαιρείσθων ὅπλα*" (*Having died, let them now rob me of the arms. Ajax* 100). After he reveals his plan to continue to torture Odysseus before killing him, Athena leaves him, but not before speaking these words of encouragement: "*σὺ δ' οὖν, ἐπειδὴ τέρψις ἥδε σοι τὸ δρᾶν,/χρῶ χειρί, φείδου μηδὲν ὧνπερ ἐννοεῖς*" (*You then, since doing it is a pleasure for you, make use of your hand, spare nothing of the things which you are considering. Ajax* 114-115).

Shay argues that there is a difference in how berserk states are triggered in American soldiers versus Homeric warriors. He says, "Bereaved American soldiers were

often urged, 'Don't get sad. Get even!' by their military superiors, but Homeric warriors never were" (Shay 1994, 94). Here, however, the goddess Athena does encourage Ajax's violent state in reaction to his betrayal. Ajax feels the same pressure to get even for his dishonor that a modern soldier feels to get even for bereavement. This is further supported by Ajax's reaction to his failure to kill the commanders in the end. He feels an implicit pressure to keep his honor, as shown by this passage:

> *καὶ ποῖον ὄμμα πατρὶ δηλώσω φανεὶς*
> *Τελαμῶνι; πῶς με τλήσεταί ποτ' εἰσιδεῖν*
> *γυμνὸν φανέντα τῶν ἀριστείων ἄτερ,*
> *ὧν αὐτὸς ἔσχε στέφανον εὐκλείας μέγαν;*
> *οὐκ ἔστι τοὔργον τλητόν.* […]
> *πεῖρά τις ζητητέα*
> *τοιάδ' ἀφ' ἧς γέροντι δηλώσω πατρὶ*
> *μή τοι φύσιν γ' ἄσπλαγχνος ἐκ κείνου γεγώς.*
>
> *And what sort of sight will I show having appeared*
> *To my father, Telamon? How will he ever bear to look upon me*
> *Appearing naked without the prizes of triumph,*
> *From which he himself had a great crown of glory?*
> *This deed is unbearable.* […]
> *Some sorts of attempts*
> *Must be sought by which I may make clear to my aged father*
> *That I was not indeed reared by him to be gutless by nature* (*Ajax* 462-466, 470-473).

Ajax feels unable to face his father if he does not have some proof of his glory in battle.

There is a hidden importance to symbols of valor to soldiers and warriors alike. Commanders who withhold these symbols from their subordinates are scorned in turn, and their action appears as a betrayal. This betrayal, in turn, is a component of the trigger for the berserk state. Shay says, "Vietnam veterans often report that berserking began shortly after the death of a special comrade, but often the time interval after a betrayal of 'what's right' was longer than in the *Iliad*,[26] and often there was one major betrayal in

[26] The betrayal to which Shay refers here is Agamemnon's theft of Achilles' war prize in Book One.

the midst of a series of lesser ones. The betrayal most bitterly recalled by one veteran, the awarding of individual medals, Combat Infantry Badges, and a unit citation for an attack on unarmed civilians occurred six months before the death of his closest comrade, the death that began his berserking" (Shay 1994, 95). As further support, Shay also points out that "Vietnam narratives reveal that the events that drive soldiers berserk are betrayal, insult, or humiliation by a leader" (Shay 1994, 80). Ajax certainly felt insult at being denied Achilles' arms, and the potency of this insult stems from the overall societal pressure to bring some proof of his valor back home.[27]

After the audience has been made aware of Ajax's feelings of betrayal, the play moves on to Tecmessa's account of Ajax's slaughter. This demonstrates that Ajax has had a striking change of character and releases his aggression without discrimination, characteristics which are both found in modern berserk soldiers. Tecmessa tells the chorus of sailors the full details of Ajax's slaughter:

> *ὤμοι: κεῖθεν κεῖθεν ἄρ' ἡμῖν*
> *δεσμῶτιν ἄγων ἤλυθε ποίμνην:*
> *ὧν τὴν μὲν ἔσω σφάζ' ἐπὶ γαίας,*
> *τὰ δὲ πλευροκοπῶν δίχ' ἀνερρήγνυ.*
> *δύο δ' ἀργίποδας κριοὺς ἀνελὼν*
> *τοῦ μὲν κεφαλὴν καὶ γλῶσσαν ἄκραν*
> *ῥιπτεῖ θερίσας, τὸν δ' ὀρθὸν ἄνω*
> *κίονι δήσας*
> *μέγαν ἱπποδέτην ῥυτῆρα λαβὼν*
> *παίει λιγυρᾷ μάστιγι διπλῇ,*
> *κακὰ δεννάζων ῥήμαθ', ἃ δαίμων*
> *κοὐδεὶς ἀνδρῶν ἐδίδαξεν.*
>
> *Ah me, thence thence he came to me*
> *Bringing the flock as his prisoner:*
> *Part of which he slew on the ground inside,*

[27] Dodds (1951) suggested that Homeric society was a "shame-culture" in which "anything which exposes a man to the contempt or ridicule of his fellows, which causes him to 'lose face,' is felt as unbearable" (Dodds 1951, 18). This can help to explain how the commanders' betrayal was able to trigger a berserk state in Ajax, even in the absence of the death of one of his comrades.

> *Others, striking their ribs he broke asunder.*
> *Having taken up two swift-footed rams,*
> *He, having torn off the head and tongue end of one*
> *Hurls them, and having bound one upright to a pillar,*
> *And having taken a large horse-binding rein,*
> *Smites it with a shrill double-whip,*
> *Cursing it with terrible words, which a spirit*
> *And not any one of men taught him* (*Ajax* 233-244).

The description of the slaughter is brutal, and her usage of a word such as "prisoner" indicates that he is treating the animals as if they were human. She later adds, "*τοὺς δὲ δεσμίους/ἠκίζεθ' ὥστε φῶτας*" (*He abused some of them in bonds as if they were men. Ajax* 299-300). The whole testimony portrays Ajax as a chaotic, uncontrollable killing machine. Ajax's personality may have contributed to this in part. Grossman reminds that "The soldier in combat is a product of his environment, and violence can beget violence. This is the nurture side of the nature-nurture question. But he is also very much influenced by his temperament, or the nature side of the nature-nurture equation" (Grossman 1995, 179). The audience would have had reason to believe that Ajax could easily be pushed into a violent state. Even before they hear the truth behind the massacre of the herds, the chorus call Ajax, "*θούριος Αἴας*" (*Raging Ajax*) in line 212, and once again much later in the play in line 1213. This word, "*θούριος*", was the same epithet used in Homer to describe Ares in the *Iliad* (5.30 and 15.127), a god who was most definitely associated with the rage of war.[28]

It may be the case that Ajax's temperament predisposes him towards a killing rage. There are elements of this slaughter, however, which correspond too closely with Shay's descriptions of the berserk state to be ignored. One veteran who entered a berserk state describes it thus: "I just went crazy. I pulled him [the enemy soldier] out into the

[28] See Blundell 1989, 65-66 for more on this, and its implications for Ajax's rise to divine status.

paddy and carved him up with my knife. When I was done with him, he looked like a rag doll that a dog had been playing with. Even then I wasn't satisfied. I was fighting with the [medical] corpsmen trying to take care of me. I was trying to get at him for more" (Shay 1994, 78). The audience is given a similar portrait of the animals whose heads, tongues, and ribs Ajax destroyed. It is clear that he has entered a "pure frenzy", as Shay calls it (Shay 1994, 82), and that he is killing indiscriminately, which is also a characteristic of the berserk state (Shay 1994, 82).[29]

The most mysterious part of Ajax's violent state is that he accidentally kills the flocks, and not the commanders whom he intended to kill, due to Athena's influence. Most accounts of berserk soldiers portray homicide instead. A passage from *The Things they Carried*, however, shows a bereaved soldier whose unusual actions resemble Ajax's:

> *Later, higher in the mountains, we came across a baby VC water buffalo. What it was doing there I don't know—no farms or paddies—but we chased it down and got a rope around it and led it along to a deserted village where we set up for the night. After supper Rat Kiley went over and stroked its nose.*
>
> *He opened up a can of C rations, pork and beans, but the baby buffalo wasn't interested.*
>
> *Rat shrugged.*
>
> *He stepped back and shot it through the right front knee. The animal did not make a sound. It went down hard, then got up again, and Rat took careful aim and shot off an ear. He shot it in the hindquarters and in the little hump at its back. He shot it twice in the flanks. It wasn't to kill; it was to hurt. He put the rifle muzzle up against the mouth and shot the mouth away. Nobody said much. The whole platoon stood there watching, feeling all kinds of things, but there wasn't a great deal of pity for the baby water buffalo. Curt Lemon was dead. Rat Kiley had lost his best friend in the world. Later in the week he would write a long personal letter to the guy's sister, who would not write back, but for now it was a question of pain. He shot off the tail. He shot away chunks of meat below the ribs. All around us there was the smell of smoke and filth and deep greenery, and the evening was humid and very hot. Rat went to automatic. He shot randomly,*

[29] Ajax's indiscriminate attitude is shown by the sheer number of animals he kills, as Athena describes him killing not only the animals which he judged to be Odysseus and the *Atreidae*, but also ones which he deemed to be unnamed commanders (*Ajax* 55-58). Together, Odysseus and the *Atreidae*, the parties responsible for Ajax's dishonor, number only three. Ajax, however, kills more animals than that, indicating that he would have indiscriminately killed even the Greeks who did not share responsibility for his betrayal.

> *almost casually, quick little spurts in the belly and butt. Then he reloaded, squatted down, and shot it in the left front knee. Again the animal fell hard and tried to get up, but this time it couldn't quite make it. It wobbled and went down sideways. Rat shot it in the nose. He bent forward and whispered something, as if talking to a pet, then he shot it in the throat. All the while the baby buffalo was silent, or almost silent, just a light bubbling sound where the nose had been. It lay very still. Nothing moved except the eyes, which were enormous, the pupils shiny black and dumb.*
>
> *Rat Kiley was crying. He tried to say something, but then cradled his rifle and went off by himself* (O'Brien 78-79).

There is, of course, one major difference between this passage and Tecmessa's claims about Ajax's slaughter: the reader is not explicitly told that Rat is mistaking the water buffalo for something else. The passages otherwise have three striking similarities. One similarity is the soldiers' graphic, chaotic slaughter of the animals. Another similarity is that both soldiers treat the animals as prisoners. The audience knows that Ajax is mistaking the flocks for Greek soldiers, and so is not surprised when Tecmessa describes them as "captives" or "prisoners." The narrator of *The Things they Carried*, however, also describes how they "capture" the buffalo. Third, both works have an emphasis on torture instead of slaughter. Ajax abuses the animals mostly to hurt them as vengeance for his betrayal.[30] In *The Things they Carried*, the reader is explicitly told that Rat Kiley shot the baby buffalo in order to hurt it, not to kill it. Thus both soldiers exhibit symptoms of the berserk state through their grief and violence, but transfer their attacks onto animals instead of humans.

Finally, there is evidence that Ajax's slaughter of the sheep was a berserk state as shown by the fact that he does not remember it afterwards. Tecmessa reveals that this was the case after he appeared to have recovered from his madness: "*καὶ τὸν μὲν ἦστο*

[30] See for instance Ajax's early comment on Odysseus to Athena: "*ἥδιστος, ὦ δέσποινα, δεσμώτης ἔσω/θακεῖ: θανεῖν γὰρ αὐτὸν οὔ τί πω θέλω*" (*My sweetest prisoner sits inside, oh mistress: for I do not in any way wish for him to die yet. Ajax* 105-106). He then explains that he wishes to whip his back before killing him (*Ajax* 108-110).

πλεῖστον ἄφθογγος χρόνον:/ἔπειτ' ἐμοὶ τὰ δείν' ἐπηπείλησ' ἔπη,/εἰ μὴ φανοίην πᾶν τὸ συντυχὸν πάθος,/κἀνήρετ' ἐν τῷ πράγματος κυροῖ ποτέ" (*And he sat for most of the time speechless: but then he threatened me with terrible words, if I did not reveal the entire event which happened, and he asked in what kind of action he found himself. Ajax* 311-314). He confirms that he had no memory of these actions and did not intentionally kill the flocks afterwards. When Tecmessa tells him what he did, "*ὁ δ' εὐθὺς ἐξώμωξεν οἰμωγὰς λυγράς*" (*He straightaway groaned out mournful wails. Ajax* 317). This confirms his emotional distress upon being reminded of his actions.

Scholars of psychiatric losses in war have noted that this is a state which can arise after prolonged exposure to combat. In about 98% of soldiers, exposure to combat for five to six straight weeks results in amnesic states or outbursts in which the soldiers may run mad with no regard for their safety (Gabriel 1987, 86-87). These states can manifest in such varieties, that Gabriel labels them in an entire category of "confusional states." He says that a confusional state "is generally marked by a psychotic dissociation from reality. He [the soldier] no longer knows where he is. Unable to deal with his environment anymore, he mentally removes himself from it. […] Frequently, manic-depressive psychosis develops in which wild swings of mood and activity are evident. […] The degree of affliction in confusional states ranges from the profoundly neurotic to the overtly psychotic" (Gabriel 1987, 89-90).[31]

It is impossible to tell from the play how much combat Ajax had seen in the period just preceding his madness. These amnesic and confusional states do occur in berserk soldiers as well, however. Shay says, "Vietnam combat veterans who have been

[31] See also Grossman 1995, 45, in which he voices his agreement with Gabriel's analysis.

berserk (and survived) are usually very clear about the incidents that brought on the change, in contrast to generally clouded memory of the berserk state itself. One Marine veteran in my program received a high decoration for individual valor and has no memory of the event. Having lost the original citation, he has declined to request a copy of it" (Shay 1994, 79). Thus if we accept that Ajax's madness was a berserk state, his memory loss and distress at its reminder make sense. There is, however, one problem that needs to be addressed: most of the examples of berserk soldiers which Shay gives have lost dear comrades. He says, "I cannot say for certain that betrayal is a necessary precondition. However, I have yet to encounter a veteran who went berserk from grief alone, as in the second phase of Pátroklos' aristeía, or from betrayal alone, if the betrayal did not cause a death or wound" (Shay 1994, 96). Obviously Ajax's loss of Achilles' arms did not cause any death or wounds. In order to reconcile his berserk state with Shay's observation, I propose two possible solutions.

The first solution is that Ajax did feel grief over the loss of Achilles. Two elements from the play exist to support this. The first element is the fact that the arms he lost are symbolic of Achilles' greatness and the respect which Ajax had for his heroism.[32] The second is a line which Ajax gives to express his grief not only over his loss of the armor, but also the loss of Achilles: "*εἰ ζῶν Ἀχιλλεὺς τῶν ὅπλων τῶν ὧν πέρι/κρίνειν ἔμελλε κράτος ἀριστείας τινί,/οὐκ ἄν τις αὖτ' ἔμαρψεν ἄλλος ἀντ' ἐμοῦ*" (*If Achilles living intended to judge the first place of glory for his arms, no one else would have taken them instead of me. Ajax* 442-444). This line could be interpreted as Ajax's lament for the death of Achilles. Tritle interprets the play in this way, and says, "The loss of the armor

[32] See Michelakis 2002, 146 for more on this role of the armor in the play

only compounds what he [Ajax] feels in the death of Achilles" (Tritle 200, 187). This loss, therefore, could be the trigger for Ajax's berserk state.

The evidence in the play is admittedly scant, however. For this reason, I propose another solution to explain Ajax's berserk state which does not exclude the possibility of the first. This solution is that a betrayal which causes a significant amount of shame can also trigger the berserk state. This is especially true if the concept of shame carries special weight in this culture. Dodds showed that public esteem had high power in Homeric society. He said, "Certain American anthropologists have lately taught us to distinguish 'shame-cultures' from 'guilt-cultures,' and the society described by Homer clearly falls into the former class. Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *tīmē*, public esteem" (Dodds 1951, 17). For a comparison, there is evidence from other "shame-culture" societies that extreme shame can trigger a berserk state. Malaysian society calls this state, "running amok." Collins and Ernaldi found that *malu*[33] was often the trigger for Malaysian men to run amok, and they define *amuk* as "a dissociative reaction that takes the form of random homicidal violence that generally ends in the death of the perpetrator" (Collins and Ernaldi 2000, 50).[34] A close study of the state of *amuk* can show some noticeable similarities between it and Ajax's madness.

First, *amuk* is preceded by *sakit hati* (liver sickness), an idiom for holding a grudge. This involves the man falling into depression and brooding over some perceived wrong (Collins and Ernaldi 2000, 51). The chorus reveals that Ajax, too, had been

[33] *Malu* is a Malaysian word which can be translated as "shame," "shy," "bashful," and "embarrassed" (Collins and Ernaldi 2000, 36).

[34] It is worth noting that the berserk state also often ends with a soldier's death (Shay 1994, 98). This will be discussed in further detail when focusing on Ajax's suicide. See page 57.

brooding quietly before the events of play when they sing, "*ἀλλ' ἄνα ἐξ ἑδράνων, ὅπου μακραίωνι/στηρίζει ποτὲ τᾶδ' ἀγωνίῳ σχολᾷ/ἄταν οὐρανίαν φλέγων*" (*But up from your seat, wherever you sit in this ever long uneasy rest, making a heavenly flame of ruin ignite. Ajax* 193-195). Second, *amuk* itself is a dissociative state which brings a misperception of reality. The following example makes the parallels between this, the berserk state, and Ajax's madness clear:

> *In one case treated by Dr. Ernaldi, the amuk went into the kitchen one morning, grabbed a* parang, *and ran out the door, attacking everyone he met. The police were able to subdue him only after he had killed several people and wounded others. After a few days of hospitalization, the man's behavior returned to normal, except that the only thing he remembered of his violent attack was that he saw pigs running about in the village and as a Muslim felt he had to kill them. Still later, the patient revealed that he had felt deeply* malu *because a man who had lent him money made the debts known to the villagers, possibly to force repayment* (Collins and Ernaldi 2000, 52).

This passage shows a similar situation, although the state of the madness is the opposite: Ajax misperceived animals as humans, while the man who ran amok misperceived humans as animals. Furthermore, like Ajax, there is no evidence that the man was bereaved when this happened. He only experienced a major, shame-inducing betrayal. Through this, it is possible to interpret Ajax's "madness" as a berserk state, even if he did not lose a close comrade in combat.

This absence of a lost comrade cannot be equated with the absence of trauma.[35] This is true for two reasons. First, the audience may assume combat trauma in Ajax, based both on their knowledge of his story in the *Iliad*, and their recognition of his symptoms as similar to those they have seen in combat veterans. It is difficult to

[35] There has even been research which suggests that shame plays a fundamental role in trauma. See e.g., Shapiro 1999.

determine. Second, the berserk state is not only often caused by trauma, but also causes trauma itself. Shay concluded that "the berserk state is ruinous, leading to the soldier's maiming or death in battle—which is the most frequent outcome—and to life-long psychological and physiological injury if he survives" (Shay 1994, 98). The audience is made aware of this as the play goes on, when his social withdrawal and suicide are made apparent.

Ajax's social withdrawal

After his betrayal and the ensuing madness, Ajax's capability to interact with others is diminished. He grows withdrawn from the community, and his social horizon shrinks. Shay finds that trauma through combat and betrayal also causes this in modern veterans (Shay 1994, 23). This social withdrawal is shown in three ways during the play. First, the play shows Ajax's physical withdrawal from the community by isolating himself within his tent. Second, it shows his emotional withdrawal through his rejection of Tecmessa and the chorus. Finally, it shows his inability to reach out to others, as evidenced by his *trugrede* (deceit speech) to the chorus.

When the chorus first enters the stage, they reveal that Ajax has distanced himself from them. They are perplexed as to why he stays within his tents and does not dispel the rumors of how he slaughtered the Greek flocks. They beg for him to show himself when they sing, "*εἰ δ' ὑποβαλλόμενοι/κλέπτουσι μύθους οἱ μεγάλοι βασιλῆς/ἢ τᾶς ἀσώτου Σισυφιδᾶν γενεᾶς,/μή, μή μ',*[36] *ἄναξ, ἔθ' ὧδ' ἐφάλοις κλισίαις/ὄμμ' ἔχων κακὰν φάτιν ἄρῃ*" (*If the great kings are slandering you, suggesting rumors, or if it is the son of the wretched line of Sisyphus, do not, do not my lord, win me a bad name, keeping your face*

[36] This "*μ*" has been under suspicion, as it suggests that Ajax's actions will give the chorus a bad name, when the bad name should more logically apply to him. Many editors remove it, but Jebb suggests that removing it creates a pattern of meter which would be unusual for tragedy (Jebb 1967, 40).

like this still in your seaside tent. Ajax 188-192). Yet Ajax does not resurface from the tent. He continues to stay within the tent for a while, and Tecmessa later gives a line which suggests that he has purposefully withdrawn himself. She says, "*νῦν δ' ἐν τοιᾷδε κείμενος κακῇ τύχῃ/ἄσιτος ἀνήρ, ἄποτος, ἐν μέσοις βοτοῖς/σιδηροκμῆσιν ἥσυχος θακεῖ πεσών*" (*Now the man, lying fasting in such a terrible fate, not drinking, sits silent having fallen in the middle of the cattle that were slain by his iron sword. Ajax* 323-325). The particular details that he neither drinks nor eats imply that his withdrawal from others in his tent is unnatural. The audience would remember that Achilles also withdrew himself and fasted after the death of Patroclus. When the Greeks bid him to eat, he responded, "*λίσσομαι, εἴ τις ἕμοιγε φίλων ἐπιπείθεθ' ἑταίρων,/μή με πρὶν σίτοιο κελεύετε μηδὲ ποτῆτος/ἅσασθαι φίλον ἦτορ, ἐπεί μ' ἄχος αἰνὸν ἱκάνει:/δύντα δ' ἐς ἠέλιον μενέω καὶ τλήσομαι ἔμπης*" (*I beg, if any of my dear comrades may be persuaded, do not bid me beforehand to sate my dear heart with food and drink, since heavy grief comes upon me: I am remaining so until the sun sets and I will bear it all the same. Iliad* 9.305-308). Shay also saw Achilles as a Homeric warrior who demonstrated how trauma ruins character.

The way Ajax hides himself in his tent in the beginning of the play, his shame, and his unwillingness to eat or drink—these all appear as markers of depression. The DSM-V lists negative alterations to mood as symptoms of trauma. These include a "Persistent negative emotional state," "Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities," and "Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)), and Shay says that war veterans are seven times more likely to have experienced a major depressive episode than others (Shay 1994, 178). Herman also notes that the social alienation which trauma causes can be severe, and proper reliance on a

social support network is essential for the victim of trauma (Herman 1992, 160). Ajax, too, has alienated himself from his community by remaining within his tent.

Next, Ajax's estrangement is further illustrated by his rejection of Tecmessa and even the chorus. At first, when Tecmessa and the chorus decide to enter his tent, Ajax welcomes the chorus, but as soon as Tecmessa speaks, he responds to her by saying, "*οὐκ ἐκτός; οὐκ ἄψορρον ἐκνεμεῖ πόδα;/αἰαῖ αἰαῖ*" (*Will you not stay out? Will you not turn your foot away, back out? Ah, ah! Ajax* 369-370). In fact, the audience hears Ajax's rejection of Tecmessa throughout the play. First, when she recalls the story of Ajax's madness, she says that she asked him where he was going, to which he responded, "*γύναι, γυναιξὶ κόσμον ἡ σιγὴ φέρει*" (*Woman, silence befits a woman. Ajax* 293). Later again, when she tells him to be pious to the gods, he retorts again to her with "*πόλλ' ἄγαν ἤδη θροεῖς*" (*Already you cry out loud too much. Ajax* 592). He reacts with vexation to the woman who is trying to help him. We can see that this "irritable behavior", as the DSM-V defines the symptom (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)), is also expressed by Vietnam veterans. They especially find it difficult to form intimate relationships with women. Lifton says of them that "Falling in love, or feeling oneself close to that state, could be especially excruciating—an exciting glimpse of a world beyond withdrawal and numbing, but also a terrifying prospect. A typical feeling, when growing fond of a girl was 'You're getting close—watch out!'" (Lifton 1973, 271). Thus his hostility towards Tecmessa shows Ajax's unwillingness to step out of his mode of social withdrawal.

Though Ajax does not display such hostility to the chorus, it is safe to say that he is estranged also from them. The chorus makes pleading gestures multiple times in the play which suggest that they have difficulty reaching out to him. This occurs not only

early on, when they bid him to leave the tent,[37] but again later when they and Tecmessa try to reach out to him. They make desperate bids to him when they say, "*οὔτοι σ' ἀπείργειν οὐδ' ὅπως ἐῶ λέγειν/ἔχω, κακοῖς τοιοῖσδε συμπεπτωκότα*" (*Thus I do not know how to keep you back or how to let you speak, you who have fallen upon such woes. Ajax* 428-429). Then, after Ajax continues to grieve for his misfortune, they respond by saying, "*οὐδεὶς ἐρεῖ ποθ' ὡς ὑπόβλητον λόγον,/Αἴας, ἔλεξας, ἀλλὰ τῆς σαυτοῦ φρενός./παῦσαί γε μέντοι καὶ δὸς ἀνδράσιν φίλοις/γνώμης κρατῆσαι, τάσδε φροντίδας μεθείς*" (*No one will ever say that you spoke a false speech, Ajax, but one of your very own soul: but stop and let men who are friends prevail over your thought, having dismissed these ideas. Ajax* 481-484). The audience sees that Ajax's friends are trying desperately to make him listen to their reasoning, but the audience also knows that they will ultimately fail. The only person whom Ajax desires at this point is Teucer, whom he calls out for in line 342. Teucer is nowhere to be found, however, and Ajax does not mention him again until he prays to Zeus before his suicide, asking him to send news of his death to Teucer (*Ajax* 827).

From this, it is apparent that Ajax's social circle has been reduced to just one person, who is not even present in the play until after Ajax's death. Shay claims that, when a soldier has experienced a betrayal of "what's right", his "social map" shrinks to an exclusive, small number of people. Shay uses this account from a Vietnam veteran to show this: "It was constant now. I was watching the other five guys like they was my children….It wasn't seventy-two guys [in the company] I was worried about. It was five guys." Just in this way, Ajax pays no heed to Tecmessa and the chorus, and only is

[37] See page 57.

concerned about Teucer. It is well established that after traumatic events, it can be difficult for friends to comfort the victim of trauma. Rosenbloom, Williams, and Watkins, in their work to help people live after trauma, say to the victims that "You may find […] some people are uncomfortable with your new, unfamiliar, or even raw feelings, particularly if they are unaccustomed to seeing you that way. Some of their discomfort may reflect their own struggle, feeling unable to comfort you or take away your pain" (Rosenbloom, Williams, and Watkins 1999, 23). This is the exact situation that the chorus finds themselves in relation to Ajax.[38]

Finally, Ajax shows purposeful rejection of his community through the final, deceitful speech he gives to the chorus before his suicide. He says to them, "*κἀγὼ γάρ, ὃς τὰ δείν' ἐκαρτέρουν τότε,/βαφῇ σίδηρος ὡς ἐθηλύνθην στόμα/πρὸς τῆσδε τῆς γυναικός*" (*For even I, who then was terribly powerful, as tempered iron, was softened*[39] *by the words of a woman. Ajax* 650-652). Sophocles presents here a speech which fools the chorus, but the audience sees through its lies. Not only does this speech contradict Ajax's prior hostility to Tecmessa, the audience knows that the narrative must continue to his suicide, which contradicts Ajax's claim, "*οἰκτίρω δέ νιν/χήραν παρ' ἐχθροῖς παῖδά τ' ὀρφανὸν λιπεῖν*" (*I pity to leave her as a widow among enemies, and to leave my child an orphan. Ajax* 653). The chorus is fooled nonetheless, and after Ajax departs, they begin their song by singing, "*ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι, περιχαρὴς δ' ἀνεπτόμαν*" (*I bristle with love,*

[38] See also Herman 1992, 205 on the trauma survivor's social world. Only once healing of the trauma has begun can the victim reconnect with others. Herman describes this process as something like a "second adolescence."

[39] The literal translation is closer to "*had my tongue softened*", but "*στόμα*" in this case conveys a sense of Ajax's temper. Jebb says that the literal sense of "*στόμα*" must be sacrificed for an actual translation (Jebb 1967, 103).

surrounded with grace I fly up. Ajax 693). Ajax does not further express his true emotions to them, and thus deceives them.

Knox says the following of the play: "In time, friends turn into enemies and enemies into friends. The *Ajax* itself is a bewildering panorama of such changed and changing relationships" (Knox 1961, 10). Ajax's deception represent a change in his attitude towards the chorus. When he first welcomed the chorus into the tent, he called them, "*φίλοι ναυβάται, μόνοι ἐμῶν φίλων,/μόνοι ἔτ' ἐμμένοντες ὀρθῷ νόμῳ*" (*Dear sailors, alone of my friends, who alone still stay in upright loyalty. Ajax* 349-350), but he shuts himself away in his tent shortly before the ode which precedes his *trugrede* (*Ajax* 595). This shows a lack of trust on Ajax's part, and his relationship with his sailors has been heavily disturbed in the midst of his post-berserk grief. Herman cites the example of a navy veteran who was betrayed by his rescuers after his ship was sunk:

> *In the aftermath of this event, the patient exhibited not only classic post-traumatic symptoms but also evidence of pathological grief, disrupted relationships, and chronic depression: "He had, in fact, a profound reaction to violence of any kind and could not see others being injured, hurt, or threatened….[However] he claimed that he felt like suddenly striking people and that he had become very pugnacious toward his family. He remarked, 'I wish I were dead; I make everybody around me suffer'"* (Herman 1992, 55-56).[40]

This contradictory nature is also seen in Ajax earlier, as he shifts between aggressively pushing Tecmessa and the chorus away, and then speaking soothing words to them. It is also impossible to ignore the suicidal message in the navy veteran's words, which is paralleled by Ajax's actual suicide.

[40] For more on this veteran and the nature of his betrayal, see page 61.

Ajax's suicide

In order to understand how Ajax's suicide stems from his post-berserk trauma, it is necessary to examine the act of his suicide itself, its relationship to his *trugrede*, and its parallels with those of modern war veterans. Through this examination, three major points of his suicide will be made apparent which support a reading of it as caused by trauma. First, it is possible to reconcile his suicide with his prior speech to the chorus, whether it was a *trugrede* or not. This is shown in part by parallels with other veterans' suicides, and in part through what Herman calls the dialectic of trauma. Second, the contrast of his suicide with that speech demonstrates his inability to adapt to a changed world, which is also an effect of trauma found in modern veterans. Finally, the existence of this suicide supports the possibility of Ajax's prior madness as a trauma-induced berserk state.

If the audience is meant to receive Ajax's speech from lines 646-692 as a *trugrede*, then its purpose is simple. Ajax wished to divert the chorus' attention away from him momentarily while he committed suicide. In fact, it is difficult not to see it as a deceit speech when Ajax says, "*τοιγὰρ τὸ λοιπὸν εἰσόμεσθα μὲν θεοῖς/εἴκειν, μαθησόμεσθα δ' Ἀτρείδας σέβειν*" (*Thus from here on, I will learn to yield to the gods, and will learn to revere the Atreidae. Ajax* 666-667). This statement contrasts sharply not only with his recent attempt to kill the *Atreidae*, but also when he had just earlier said to Tecmessa, "*οὐ κάτοισθ' ἐγὼ θεοῖς/ὡς οὐδὲν ἀρκεῖν εἶμ' ὀφειλέτης ἔτι;*" (*Do you not know that I am under no debt any longer to help the gods? Ajax* 589-590), which demonstrates

his contempt for the gods as well.[41] This speech certainly supports the argument that he is deceiving the chorus, and the desire to quietly escape from friends and family to commit suicide is not unique. In *The Things they Carried*, after Norman Bowker quietly committed suicide without leaving a note, his mother commented, "Norman was a quiet boy […] and I don't suppose he wanted to bother anybody" (O'Brien 1990, 160).

Some scholars, however, have criticized interpreting Ajax's speech as a *trugrede*. Bowra, for instance, sees it as a straightforward, honest change of heart in Ajax (Bowra 1944, 40), while Knox sees it as a self-directed speech which displays Ajax's internal conflict (Knox 1961, 12). Both use the inconsistency of Ajax's character as a basis for their objection. A deception speech would run counter to the virtues which Ajax espouses (Knox 1961, 12). These interpretations still support that Ajax's suicide was caused by trauma, however, for two reasons. The first reason is that an inconstant character is also a trauma symptom. Herman calls this the "dialectic of trauma", and says that trauma victims find themselves often shifting between states of intense emotions and states of apathy (Herman 1992, 47). While Ajax showed extreme agitation in the tents, and expressed his agitation through his hostility towards Tecmessa, this speech gives a different side to him. He appears calm and in control of himself, especially when he says, "*ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ μὲν τούτοισιν εὖ σχήσει*" (*But concerning these sorts of things, it will turn out well. Ajax* 684). This shift in emotion does not indicate a core change in Ajax's desires. His suicidal tendencies have still been alive, ever since earlier on in the play, when he bid the chorus, "*ἀλλά με συνδάϊξον*" (*Come slay me as well* [i.e., along with the cattle]. *Ajax* 361).

[41] It is worth comparing that modern sufferers of trauma often feel their faith in supreme powers shattered after experiencing the traumatic event (Herman 1992, 55). See e.g. Hemingway's "Soldier's Home", in which a World War I veteran says to his mother, "I'm not in His Kingdom" (Hemingway 1925, 21).

The second reason why Ajax's suicide can still be seen as a product of trauma is that there are examples of modern veterans who, after showing courage and giving a hopeful message to others, still commit suicide. A famous example of this is the suicide of Lewis B. Puller, Jr., who committed suicide after once writing a hopeful and inspirational autobiography, entitled *Fortunate Son: The Healing of a Vietnam Vet*. Shay says that "Lewis Puller's grit and courage inspired many; the shock and prostration from learning of his suicide were deepened by the prior uplift" (Shay 2002, 179). Ajax attributes these same virtues to himself, calling himself, "*θρασύν*" (*Bold*), "*εὐκάρδιον*" (*Good-hearted* or *strong-hearted*), and "*ἄτρεστον*" (*Fearless. Ajax* 364-365). Even individuals who show exceptional fortitude can still succumb to their trauma symptoms suddenly and without warning.

Another element of the suicide which points to trauma is that it demonstrates Ajax's inability to adapt to a changed world. Throughout Ajax's supposed *trugrede*, the hero references the need for all things to change. He emphasizes that change is the natural order of the world when he says,

> *καὶ γὰρ τὰ δεινὰ καὶ τὰ καρτερώτατα*
> *τιμαῖς ὑπείκει: τοῦτο μὲν νιφοστιβεῖς*
> *χειμῶνες ἐκχωροῦσιν εὐκάρπῳ θέρει:*
> *ἐξίσταται δὲ νυκτὸς αἰανὴς κύκλος*
> *τῇ λευκοπώλῳ φέγγος ἡμέρᾳ φλέγειν:*
> *δεινῶν τ' ἄημα πνευμάτων ἐκοίμισε*
> *στένοντα πόντον: ἐν δ' ὁ παγκρατὴς ὕπνος*
> *λύει πεδήσας, οὐδ' ἀεὶ λαβὼν ἔχει.*
>
> *The strongest and terrible things*
> *Submit to authority: in this way snow-piled*
> *Winter gives way to fruitful summer.*
> *The eternal orbit of night is put aside*
> *For white-horsed day to burn down its rays.*
> *The blast of terrible winds puts the groaning*
> *Sea in order: and among them all-mighty sleep,*

Having bound a man releases him, and cannot always hold him (*Ajax* 669-676). Having said this in his speech, Ajax commits suicide. Is his suicide meant to be a rejection of this sentiment? Sorum interprets it this way. When Ajax's slaughter of the flocks invites the wrath of the *Atreidae*, he finds himself in a different world. Sorum says, "Ajax's exclusion from the community negates his potential to function as a hero, and yet his ethic remains Homeric" (Sorum 1986, 362). In other words, he has been transferred out of the world of warriors, and yet still functions as a warrior. This is supported further by Sorum's assertion that the portion of the play after Ajax's death "has often been regarded as a depiction of the 'non-heroic' world, which is a place of ugly and worthless men" (Sorum 1986, 373). This is the world to which Ajax would have needed to adapt, had he not committed suicide. His suicide was his rejection of this world.

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay explains that a common characteristic of trauma symptoms is persistence—especially the persistence of what made the soldier a soldier, such as their alertness and their survival skills. This persistence of the traumatized self leads to the destruction of the capacity for democratic participation (Shay 1994, 180). Knox has also remarked that Ajax's death represents a transition from the old heroic world to the more democratic world (Knox 1961, 21). He also notes that Ajax's language (as he speaks of the need to change and submit to the *Atreidae*) uses "terms which recall Athenian democratic procedure" (Knox 1961, 24).[42] This is the world to which Ajax cannot adapt, but it is not due to any incomprehensible stubbornness. A democratic world only functions when its people trust in the greater morality of the world. According to Shay,

[42] Specifically, Knox refers here to "*ἄρχοντές*", which is the usual word for Athenian magistrates.

> *Democratic process entails debate, persuasion, and compromise. These all presuppose the trustworthiness of words. The moral dimension of severe trauma, the betrayal of 'what's right,' obliterates the capacity for trust. The customary meanings of words are exchanged for new ones; fair offers from opponents are scrutinized for traps; every smile conceals a dagger* (Shay 1994, 181).

This twisted perception of the democratic world is exactly the type of world Ajax despises. Untrustworthy words, trapped offers, and fake smiles are exactly what Odysseus, Ajax's most hated enemy, embodies. Until the end of the play, as Barker says, "the chorus, along with Ajax and his supporters, have uniformly and consistently condemned Odysseus as wily, deceptive, self-seeking" (Barker 2004, 15-16). This is supported by Ajax's early denunciation of Odysseus as an "*ἄλημα*", a "*wily knave*" (*Ajax* 381). Thus Ajax rejects adapting to Odysseus and his world, as the betrayal he experienced makes that world worthless to him.

Finally, Ajax's suicide supports the interpretation of his "madness" as a berserk state. The final result of the berserk state is typically death. Shay claims that some soldiers went berserk and sought death in battle out of their grief from losing a comrade. Those who somehow survived returned to civilian life with the feeling of "death-deserving guilt" (Shay 1994, 73). Doubtlessly, some of these people did find some way of killing themselves after their return home. Lifton, for example, describes a veteran who proudly spoke of his "40 confirmed Vietcong kills", but after six months of duty felt a "severe depressive reaction." Even after his hospitalization for this, the man made three unsuccessful suicide attempts, and finally succeeded on the fourth (Lifton 1973, 394). Likewise, the Malaysian *amuk* state often results in death, often manifesting as a form of

murder-suicide.[43] The comparison between this and the soldier's berserk state has been made before, as early as 1901, when *The British Medical Journal* summarized the opinion of Dr. Connolly, who had been studying the *amuk* state: "He did not think that amok was peculiar to the Malay race; a parallel was afforded by such instances as that of a soldier who would suddenly start up in barracks and shoot his comrade or his officer, and wind up by shooting himself" ("Amok" 1901, 1570).

The ways in which Ajax's state of madness are similar to the berserk and *amuk* states have already been examined. His death also has an element of the heroic, warrior death to it, however, which puts it somewhere between suicide and the heroic death of battle.[44] This element is Ajax's particular use of Hector's sword to commit suicide. When Ajax speaks of the sword, he envisions it as the source of his troubles, as opposed to Odysseus or the *Atreidae*. He says, "*ἀλλ' αὐτὸ νὺξ Ἄιδης τε σῳζόντων κάτω./ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐξ οὗ χειρὶ τοῦτ' ἐδεξάμην/παρ' Ἕκτορος δώρημα δυσμενεστάτου,/οὔπω τι κεδνὸν ἔσχον Ἀργείων πάρα*" (*But let night and Hades keep it* [the sword] *below. For from the time when I took this gift in my hand from Hector, the man most hostile to me, never did I have anything good from the Argives. Ajax* 660-664). Ajax's denouncement of Hector as his greatest enemy may seem strange in the light of the sword's status as a gift of friendship,[45] but Kane notes that "Hector and Ajax are frequently paired as adversaries,

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[43] See the 1956 correspondence between Fenton-Russell and Robin. Fenton-Russell suggests that *amuk* may be a culturally accepted form of suicide in cultures where typical suicide is taboo. See also Collins and Ernaldi on *amuk*'s early status as ritualized suicide (Collins and Ernaldi 2000, 50).

[44] This is not meant to imply that Ajax, or Greeks in general for that matter, shared the same cultural taboo against suicide which is found in American or Malay-speaking cultures. Faber notes that it is impossible to assume a homogeneous outlook on suicide on the part of *Ajax*'s audience, or that Sophocles would have written the play to appeal to any particular outlook (Faber 1970, 8). Moreover, his interpretation of Ajax's suicide is that it is his method of re-establishing his relationship with his father, an action of honor-restoration (Faber 1970, 20).

[45] In the *Iliad*, Ajax receives the sword from Hector after a duel, and Hector expresses good-will towards Ajax when he says, "*δῶρα δ' ἄγ' ἀλλήλοισι περικλυτὰ δώομεν ἄμφω,/ὄφρά τις ὧδ' εἴπῃσιν Ἀχαιῶν τε Τρώων*

and in some encounters show a pronounced hostility, refuting the notion that they have contracted a ritual friendship" (Kane 1996, 20). In this way, by restating the hostility of Hector in relation to the sword, Ajax uses the sword as a replacement for Hector himself. In doing so, Ajax makes his suicide a warrior's death, by being killed by Hector. This interpretation is supported by Teucer's later claim. As he sees Ajax's body, he interprets the death as that of a warrior, saying, "*εἶδες ὡς χρόνῳ/ἔμελλέ σ' Ἕκτωρ καὶ θανὼν ἀποφθίσειν;*" (*Do you see how, in time, Hector intended to kill you, even having died? Ajax* 1026-1027). Through this interpretation, Ajax did die not through suicide, but through the "self-execution" of warriors which Shay saw so often in berserk soldiers (Shay 1994, 74).

With Ajax's death, Sophocles' illustration of the traumatized soldier is completed. The betrayal and dishonor he felt, combined with his life on the battlefield, led Ajax into a berserk state. This state caused further trauma, as he withdrew from his community, until he pushed Tecmessa and the chorus away, and showed hostility towards them. Finally, he decides that he must commit suicide, either through his inability to adapt to a new world because of the betrayal, or due to effects of his berserk state. The *Ajax* is a cautionary tale of the warrior who is gravely affected by the berserk state, and how he will end up when he cannot reach out to a community.

τε:/ἠμὲν ἐμαρνάσθην ἔριδος πέρι θυμοβόροιο,/ἠδ' αὖτ' ἐν φιλότητι διέτμαγεν ἀρθμήσαντε" (*Come, let us both give glorious gifts to each other, so that through this someone of the Achaeans and Trojans may say this: both fought each other in heart-eating strife, but then both parted being united in friendship. Iliad* 7.299-302).

Chapter Three: *Philoctetes*

As Chapter One covered in detail, Athens suffered a great many blows in the Peloponnesian War during the period between the productions of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Two of the more recent events, the disaster of the Sicilian Expedition in around 415 and the Oligarchic Coup in 411, must have taken their toll on the Athenians at home as well. By 409, the date of *Philoctetes*' production, the prospect of a lasting Athenian hegemony was becoming dimmer than ever. Athens had lost a great number of its allies, and found itself surrounded on all sides by enemies who had turned to supporting Sparta. This political climate was reflected in the setting of the play: a wounded soldier is left alone to fend for himself on an island, and sees all of the other Greeks as his enemies.[46]

Philoctetes uses three major techniques as a play about trauma and its healing. First, it shows how isolation and estrangement from a social community are an effect of trauma. Second, it displays the emotional distress and vulnerability that this isolation can cause. Third, it provides advice on how to handle these symptoms of combat exposure and subsequent betrayal: it shows that mutual understanding among those who have been exposed to war can lead to healing (as symbolized by the literal healing of Philoctetes' wound). In this chapter, I will show that the play is an effective allegory for how the events of war can isolate a veteran from his community, how his emotional distress is born from that trauma, and how he may be healed afterward.

[46] See Austin 2011, 5 for an outline of the troubles in Athens which were contemporary with the play's production.

Isolation as caused by betrayal and trauma

First, it is necessary to establish that isolation and the withdrawal of a social support network is an effect—even a symptom, of war trauma. The DSM-V defines "Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" as one symptom (DSM-V 309.81 (F43.10)), and Shay points out that after a "betrayal of what's right", a soldier's social community can shrink to even only one companion (Shay 1994, 28). Herman also notes that only after a few stages of recovery from trauma can a survivor learn when to trust someone and when not to (Herman 1992, 205). We will see that Philoctetes does not know when to trust someone: he trusts Neoptolemus when he offers to take him home (which would not lead to the healing of his disease), but refuses to trust him when he asks him to return to the Greek army (which would heal his physical disease, and reintegrate him into his social community). It is also important to note that this feeling of betrayal and abandonment can itself cause trauma. For example, Herman gives a case where it was a veteran's feeling of betrayal, and not the danger of his situation, which most traumatised him:

> *In Abram Kardiner's psychotherapy of the navy veteran who had been rescued at sea after his ship was sunk, the veteran became most upset when revealing how he felt let down by his own side: 'The patient became rather excited and began to swear profusely; his anger was aroused clearly by incidents connected with his rescue. They had been in the water for a period of about twelve hours when a torpedo-boat destroyer picked them up. Of course the officers in the lifeboats were taken off first. The eight or nine men clinging to the raft the patient was on had to wait in the water for six or seven hours longer until help came.'*
>
> *The officers had been rescued first, even though they were already relatively safe in lifeboats, while the enlisted men hanging onto the raft were passed over, and some of them drowned as they awaited rescue. Though Kardiner accepted this procedure as part of the normal military order, the patient was horrified at the realization that he was expendable to his own people. The rescuers' disregard for this man's life was more traumatic to him than were the enemy attack, the physical pain of submersion in the cold water, the terror of death, and the loss of the other men who shared his ordeal* (Herman 1992, 55).

The traumatic cycle which is found in *Philoctetes* begins with betrayal, which leads to trauma which then leads to isolation as an effect. It is the betrayal which causes trauma (which has been made more potent by the physical injury of Philoctetes' snake bite); the isolation and distrust with which Sophocles fills the play are symptoms of that trauma.

One may make the argument that Philoctetes' isolation is forced upon him by an outside force (Odysseus), and not by trauma. Recall, however, that the purpose of the play's narrative is to bring Philoctetes back into his social community, which is thwarted by his obstinate refusal. At the end of the play, when Neoptolemus has regained the trust of Philoctetes, he says that he wishes to take him "*πρὸς τοὺς μὲν οὖν σε τήνδε τ' ἔμπυον βάσιν/παύσοντας ἄλγους κἀποσώσοντας νόσου*" (*To those who stop both your festering step and stop the pains of your sickness. Philoctetes* 1378-1379). Philoctetes refuses to rejoin the community even with this promise and with the accompaniment of Neoptolemus as a companion. Thus, for the purpose of the play, his isolation is self-enforced.

The play sets up the isolation and vulnerability of Philoctetes in three ways—by drawing on the mythological tradition of the character and making his suffering even more extreme, by using the setting of the play to show the character's withdrawal from a social environment, and by giving him lines which show the depths of the estrangement from his community that the trauma of betrayal has caused. The background of the play's mythological narrative already begins with a "betrayal of what is right"[47] which leads to the theme of isolation. A combination of a peculiar snake bite and the betrayal of the

[47] Phrase borrowed from Shay. See page 3 and Shay 1994, xx.

Greek expedition leads Philoctetes into a ten-year journey into isolation. The bite changes his demeanor, making him an irritant to the other Greeks on the expedition. Odysseus explains that he abandoned him when "*οὔτε λοιβῆς ἡμὶν οὔτε θυμάτων/παρῆν ἑκήλοις προσθιγεῖν*" (*It was not possible for us to engage in either libation or sacrifice in peace. Philoctetes* 8-9). The Athenians would doubtlessly have been experienced with the problem of how to handle wounded soldiers as well. Tritle notes that "During the Peloponnesian War, space was even tighter, as many people from the country had fled to Athens seeking refuge from the annual Spartan invasions. In such close quarters people could hear the cries and moans of the wounded and, more disturbing, see their amputated limbs and smell the infections, as men slowly and painfully died from their wounds" (Tritle 2000, 195). It is a topic which is otherwise rather understated in the Homeric cycle. In the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, there are few heroes who survive their wounds, and even Menelaus' non-fatal wound in Book Four is not otherwise dwelt upon for too long. Of course, if these myths do not dwell on physical wounds, they most certainly do display many cases of "moral injury."[48] Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is no exception. The setting for the play, the abandoned island of Lemnos, gives the impression of Philoctetes' infection spreading to his mind and engulfing the island itself, until it, like him, is a hardened, isolated point in nature which other humans simply pass by on their journeys.[49]

It is clear that Philoctetes' sickness led to his isolation, and illness has also lead to abandonment in modern veterans.[50] The evidence for the abandonment of wounded

[48] See Shay 1994, 169, in which he defines "moral injury" as enduring personality changes which include "a hostile or mistrustful attitude toward the world", "social withdrawal", and "estrangement."

[49] See, for example, Worman's treatment of the environment of the play as reflective of Philoctetes and his disease (2000).

[50] Take, for example, this account from a Vietnam veteran in 1976 who felt abandoned by his government in the hospital setting: "The men in my room throw their breadcrumbs under the radiator to keep the rats from

Peloponnesian War veterans in Athens, however, is less clear. Nevertheless, there was one event during the course of the war in which many Athenians also felt abandoned and isolated from their community. Thucydides provides evidence that the plague of Athens was such a drain on the city's resources that "*καὶ πολλοὶ τοῦτο τῶν ἠμελημένων ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἔδρασαν ἐς φρέατα, τῇ δίψῃ ἀπαύστῳ ξυνεχόμενοι*" (*In fact many of the men who were not cared for even did this* [dove in] *to the wells, being compelled by their insatiable thirst. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.49.5). He goes on further to mention that "*ἔθνῃσκον δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀμελείᾳ*" (*Some died out of lack of care. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.51.2), and even more significantly, "*δεινότατον δὲ παντὸς ἦν τοῦ κακοῦ ἥ τε ἀθυμία ὁπότε τις αἴσθοιτο κάμνων*" (*The most terrible of every evil was the despair which someone suffering felt. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.51.4). Philoctetes' own cries of suffering which will be discussed later reflect this feeling of despair. Thus during this period of war, some Athenians would have been familiar with the isolation that disease caused. What would the cure for the trauma caused by abandonment and betrayal be? In the end of *Philoctetes*, this is revealed as mutual understanding from someone who has had a similar experience, and this correlates with Thucydides' account that "*ἐπὶ πλέον δ' ὅμως οἱ διαπεφευγότες τόν τε θνήσκοντα καὶ τὸν πονούμενον ᾠκτίζοντο διὰ τὸ προειδέναι τε καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤδη ἐν τῷ θαρσαλέῳ εἶναι*" (*Most of all those who altogether recovered had compassion for man who was both dying and suffering, on account of both having experienced it and themselves being already being of good courage. History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.51.6). Thus the experience of Philoctetes' isolation and subsequent help would have resonated with the Athenian

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chewing on our numb legs during the night […] the sheets are never changed enough and many of the men stink from not being properly bathed. It never makes any sense to us how the government can keep asking money for weapons and leave us lying in our own filth." Quoted in Tritle 2000, 196.

audience at the very least through their experience of the plague, but possibly also in their experience of caring for the wounded of the war.

Sophocles also adds his own innovations to the traditional plotline of *Philoctetes* to magnify the presence of his isolation. Though the other versions of this play are lost to us, Dio Chrysostom's essay comparing Sophocles' *Philoctetes* with those of Aeschylus and Euripides can allow readers to see what makes this play stand out so much that it was not lost to time like the other two. Both versions of *Philoctetes* by Aeschylus and Euripides were earlier than that of Sophocles, and while the main premises of the plays are the same, Sophocles' setting stands out in its portrayal of the bleakness and loneliness of Philoctetes' life. Dio Chrysostom (*Lectio* 52) suggests that Aeschylus' version was straightforward and true to the heroic tradition, while Euripides made his own innovations by still including Odysseus, but adding in the old Homeric trope of having him disguised by Athena.[51] He also included Diomedes as Odysseus' partner, who was the one sent to bring Philoctetes to Troy in the original myth (Austin 2011, 31). Sophocles, on the other hand, uses the chorus to make a striking difference in his version: both Aeschylus and Euripides include a group of Lemnians as the chorus, indicating that the island of Lemnos was not completely deserted, but instead Philoctetes was somehow isolated from the rest of its population. Sophocles, however, makes the chorus comprise of Neoptolemus' subordinates, which indicates that the island had been completely abandoned when Philoctetes was forced to stay on it. Thus Sophocles innovates in order to emphasize the isolation of Philoctetes.

[51] See e.g. *Odyssey* 13.397ff., in which Athena disguises Odysseus to fool Penelope's suitors.

So far I have discussed how the playwright uses the mythological background of the play to establish the isolation of Philoctetes and his reason for trauma--that is, his betrayal by the Greek army. Here I will show how the text itself reinforces this. Sophocles transformed the theme of the play into one that focuses on the desolation of Philoctetes caused by the trauma of betrayal and an open physical wound. The chorus is comprised not of Lemnians, but the followers of Neoptolemus whom he inherited from his father, Achilles. All throughout the play, the setting and dialogue encircle the isolation of Philoctetes, which was caused by his betrayal and the destruction of his capacity to trust. The play opens with vocabulary which calls this to mind, when Odysseus says, "*ἀκτὴ μὲν ἥδε τῆς περιρρύτου χθονὸς/Λήμνου, βροτοῖς ἄστιπτος οὐδ' οἰκουμένη*" (*This is the shore of the sea-girt land of Lemnos, uninhabited and untrodden by mortals. Philoctetes* 1-2). Whenever a character describes the island in this play, they are also describing the qualities of Philoctetes, as someone who cannot let others in due to his trauma. Judith Herman dedicates a chapter of her work, Trauma and Recovery, to the disconnection that victims feel. She notes,

> *Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living* (Herman 1992, 52).

It is important not to ignore the ever-present fact of Philoctetes' physical, debilitating wound. This wound causes him to cry out, as Herman has mentioned, to the gods, to death, and to the shades below. It is a wound of war, in so much that a snake-bite in Vietnam would also be a wound from war, and would be treated as such. Instead of

treatment, however, Philoctetes receives abandonment as the military's response to his injury. Odysseus gives their reasons for doing so with the following: "*ὅτ' οὔτε λοιβῆς ἡμὶν οὔτε θυμάτων/παρῆν ἐκήλοις προσθιγεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀγρίαις/κατεῖχ' ἀεὶ πᾶν στρατόπεδον δυσφημίαις,/βοῶν, στενάζων*" (*Since it was not possible for us to engage in either libation or sacrifice in peace, but he always filled the entire camp with savage blasphemies, shouting, groaning. Philoctetes* 8-11). The fact is that wounded soldiers occupy a difficult position in the world. They are unfit to fight, and so cannot continue on with their comrades in war. Likewise, they face even more difficulties than others in returning to civilian life. Gerber says, "At the end of World War II Americans, with a sharply divided consciousness that both honored the veteran and feared his potential to disrupt society, prepared to receive and reintegrate millions of demobilized men. The return of the disabled veteran gave rise to particularly acute anxieties, for his difficulties in adjusting to civilian life would be compounded by his injuries" (Gerber 1994, 545). The Greek military decided to take the easy way out with Philoctetes, and leave him in exactly that state in which the injury put him. He remained trapped between the worlds of war and peace, between Greece and Troy, on Lemnos. Near the end of *The Things they Carried*, O'Brien describes his feelings after an injury left him working as a non-combatant: "I felt something shift inside me. It was anger, partly, but it was also a sense of pure and total loss: I didn't fit anymore. They were soldiers, I wasn't. In a few days they'd saddle up and head back into the bush, and I'd stand up on the helipad to watch them march away, and then after they were gone I'd spend the day loading resupply choppers until it was time to catch a movie or play cards or drink myself to sleep. A funny thing, but I felt betrayed" (O'Brien 1990, 198). Likewise, Philoctetes is left on the

island not as a warrior, but someone who desperately wanted to remain one. He can only cling to his bow as a memory of those days, and watch the ships of merchants (which would necessarily remind him of the Trojan expedition ships) pass by his island (*Philoctetes* 298-310).

If the island is a metaphor for Philoctetes himself, then the cave in which he dwells can be taken as a representation of his consciousness. What is it that occupies Philoctetes' thoughts? Neoptolemus, sent out to scout ahead by Odysseus, reports on what he glimpses in the cave: "*στιπτή γε φυλλὰς ὡς ἐναυλίζοντί τῳ.* […] *αὐτόξυλόν γ' ἔκπωμα, φλαυρουργοῦ τινος/τεχνήματ' ἀνδρός, καὶ πυρεῖ' ὁμοῦ τάδε.* […] *ἰοὺ ἰού: καὶ ταῦτά γ' ἄλλα θάλπεται/ῥάκη, βαρείας του νοσηλείας πλέα*" (*There are trodden down leaves as for someone to sleep upon.* […] *There is also a wooden cup, the craft of some unskilled man, and this kindling together with it.* […] *Ugh, ugh: there are also these rags set out to dry, full of heavy pus. Philoctetes* 33, 35-36, 38-39). This is the first physical evidence that the audience is given of Philoctetes' deterioration. The impression is that the cave—Philoctetes' mind—is devoid of anything meaningful or civilized. His mind is focused on only his basic survival: sleeping, eating, and treating his injury. Every day, for the past ten years, his mind has been focused on his basic survival, and only this has kept him alive for so long with a crippling wound.[52]

There is one object that is missing from the cave. Philoctetes inherited the bow and arrows of Heracles, and its absence from the island cave indicates that it is so important to him that it is always on his person. The bow is not on his mind—it is part of him. The connection between the bow and his identity becomes clearer as the play goes

[52] Worman has also commented on the cave as a metaphor for the well-being of Philoctetes, though in a different aspect. For example, she notes the double-mouths of the cave and their functions in summer and winter as representative of the oscillation disease and health (Worman 2000, 18).

on, but Odysseus' foreboding command to Neoptolemus alludes to this early on. He says, "*τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ/ψυχὴν ὅπως δόλοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων*" (*Philoctetes* 54-55), which Norman Austin translates as "It is necessary for you—you must see how you using words will steal the soul of Philoctetes." As Austin points out, many translations of these lines have Odysseus commanding Neoptolemus to trick or beguile Philoctetes' mind, but this more literal translation displays the truly sinister nature of Odysseus' mission (Austin 2011, 50). Austin's translation implicates the oncoming destruction of Philoctetes' moral security by experiencing yet another betrayal. He expects Neoptolemus to be on this island to help him, and yet Neoptolemus will be using Philoctetes for his own purposes. This will seal the doom on his belief in "what is right", as Jonathan Shay calls it, and further his disconnection from the Greek world.

By his extreme attachment to his bow, the reminder of his companion, Philoctetes has reduced his social horizon to that of one person, Heracles. When Philoctetes speaks of the Greeks who betrayed him, he curses them with all of his fury, saying, for example, "*οἶ' Ὀλύμπιοι θεοὶ/δοῖέν ποτ' αὐτοῖς ἀντίποιν' ἐμοῦ παθεῖν*" (*Would that the Olympian gods give them repayment for my suffering. Philoctetes* 315-316). Shay quotes a veteran who shows a similar sentiment towards a group of soldiers who he felt betrayed him. After his own social community diminished to only five other people, he reminisced on his betrayal by Bravo Company, and said, "Fuck Bravo Company. I hope all them motherfuckers die" (Shay 1994, 24). Betrayal and the subsequent lack of a social community build resentment, as shown both by Philoctetes and this veteran. This resentment traps Philoctetes in a cycle of isolation, as when Odysseus attempts to bring him back, Philoctetes says, in order to keep from rejoining, "*κρᾶτ' ἐμὸν τόδ' αὐτίκα/πέτρᾳ*

πέτρας ἄνωθεν αἱμάξω πεσών" (*I will bloody this head of mine straight on a rock, having fallen down onto rocks. Philoctetes* 1002-1003). It is only his special companion, Heracles, who can at this point convince him of anything, as he does at the end of the play.

What can a soldier do when he is left abandoned due to the fact that his comrades have been killed? They cannot blame the men themselves for dying, and when an enemy kills them, it is not betrayal. They may, however, see it as a betrayal on a cosmic level. Oftentimes, the veterans who have seen the horrors of war lose faith in the justice of the world, and wonder how God could allow such things to happen. Herman quotes a Vietnam veteran who struggled with this betrayal, and admitted, "I could not rationalize in my mind how God let good men die. I had gone to several…priests. I was sitting there with this one priest and said, 'Father, I don't understand this: How does God allow small children to be killed? What is this thing, this war, this bullshit? I got all these friends who are dead.' …That priest, he looked me in the eye and said, 'I don't know, son, I've never been in war.' I said, 'I didn't ask you about war, I asked you about God'" (Herman 1992, 55). In just such a way Philoctetes blames the nature of the heavens when he hears of the deaths of men whom he respected. Upon hearing of the deaths of Achilles, Ajax, and Antilochus, he says,

> *οὐδέν πω κακόν γ' ἀπώλετο,*
> *ἀλλ' εὖ περιστέλλουσιν αὐτὰ δαίμονες,*
> *καί πως τὰ μὲν πανοῦργα καὶ παλιντριβῆ*
> *χαίρουσ' ἀναστρέφοντες ἐξ Ἅιδου, τὰ δὲ*
> *δίκαια καὶ τὰ χρήστ' ἀποστέλλουσ' ἀεί.*
> *ποῦ χρὴ τίθεσθαι ταῦτα, ποῦ δ' αἰνεῖν, ὅταν*
> *τὰ θεῖ' ἐπαινῶν τοὺς θεοὺς εὕρω κακούς;*
>
> *Nothing bad ever dies,*
> *But the gods maintain these things well,*

> *And rejoice in the villainous and knavish,*
> *Rallying them from Hades, but*
> *The just and the best they always banish.*
> *How is it necessary to put these things forth, to speak of them,*
> *When, praising the divine, I discover the gods are evil?* (*Philoctetes* 446-452)

The deaths of good men can destroy soldiers' beliefs in the possibility of a just world. Thus Philoctetes feels abandoned and isolated not only by his community, but by the gods themselves. Objectively speaking, however, it was the war which caused their deaths. In other words, the course of war by nature causes a soldier to feel abandoned and isolated, which in turn causes trauma.[53]

The vulnerability and emotional distress of Philoctetes

So far I have examined the element of isolation in *Philoctetes*, and how that was created from the Greek army's betrayal and the trauma which that caused. Now I will move on to explore the trauma itself more thoroughly by examining Philoctetes' emotional distress and comparing it to that of modern war veterans. This distress is exposed in the play in three ways: first, through Philoctetes' desire at times to be killed just like Heracles; second, through his anxiety about his social relations, as shown by his concern about his former companions and his father; and third, through his constant worry that he may be abandoned at any time.

The myth's narrative makes it clear that the sufferings of Philoctetes started even before he was bitten by the snake on Chryse. His traumatic experience begins with the death of his special comrade, just as the death of Patroclus was for Achilles. Shay outlines the extreme distress which the death of a special comrade can cause. He claims that such sentiments as, "I should have been the one to die" (Shay 1994, 69), or a feeling

[53] See page 61 for how abandonment can lead to trauma.

of dissociation or zombification after witnessing a friend's death (Shay 1994, 68), are not uncommon. Following Heracles' death, Philoctetes embarks on the expedition against Troy, and Avery suggests that *Philoctetes* is a story of the failure of Philoctetes to prove himself worthy of Heracles' heroic status during this expedition, due to his obstinacy against going to Troy. He says that Philoctetes was "asked to do what was expected of him, to go to Troy, to help his enemies. Heracles would have done this, even though Odysseus was no more hateful to Philoctetes than Eurystheus was to Heracles. Heracles would have done it, but it was not in Philoctetes to do it" (Avery 1965, 295). The audience can forgive Philoctetes, however, for not being up to the task of living up to the standard of a hero who had transcended his own humanity. To reach that level of perfection would be unreasonable to expect of him. Yet, his desire to be a "Heracles" in his own right is demonstrated fully when he demands, "*ὦ τέκνον ὦ γενναῖον, ἀλλὰ συλλαβὼν/τῷ Λημνίῳ τῷδ' ἀνακαλουμένῳ πυρὶ/ἔμπρησον, ὦ γενναῖε: κἀγώ τοί ποτε/τὸν τοῦ Διὸς παῖδ' ἀντὶ τῶνδε τῶν ὅπλων,/ἃ νῦν σὺ σώζεις, τοῦτ' ἐπηξίωσα δρᾶν*" (*Oh, oh noble child, but having taken me, burn me in the famous Lemnian fire, oh noble boy: I also once indeed thought it right to do this for the son of Zeus in exchange for the weapons which you now keep. Philoctetes* 799-804). Influenced, no doubt, by the pain of his disease, Philoctetes suggests an assisted suicide, but this method and his mention of Heracles at the end call into question whether his motive is only due to the pain of his snake bite. Either through his grief at remembering how he helped Heracles die a painless death, or through his desire to be on the same heroic level, he requests a nearly identical heroic death. Shay notes that some veterans who have felt guilt at the death of their comrades have committed suicide outright, but on the other hand, "others recoiled from

the stigma of suicide even as they pronounced a death sentence upon themselves. These sought the honorable compromise of death in battles and went berserk. They neither expected to survive nor wanted to" (Shay 1994, 73). Thus, also, Philoctetes does not object to his own death in connection with the death of his comrade. By its close connection with the death of a great hero, his own suicide becomes more palatable to him.

This is, of course, not the only time during which Philoctetes' thoughts turn to suicide. The audience is to infer that his desire to kill himself is caused by the sheer physical pain of his disease, as in this line, "*χρῶτ' ἀπὸ πάντα καὶ ἄρθρα τέμω χερί*" (*I will cut off by hand my skin and all my joints. Philoctetes* 1207), delivered to the chorus after he has another attack of his disease. There is reason, however, to suspect that his desires for suicide go beyond simply physical pain, and that there is an emotional aspect to his demands. This is connected with the loss of his companion, Heracles, and the betrayal he experienced. For instance, after Neoptolemus steals the bow from him, he claims that he cannot regain it from him for a peculiar reason. He says, "*ὡς ἄνδρ' ἑλὼν ἰσχυρόν ἐκ βίας μ' ἄγει,/κοὐκ οἶδ' ἐναίρων νεκρὸν ἢ καπνοῦ σκιάν,/εἴδωλον ἄλλως*" (*He takes me by force as though having taken a mighty man, and does not know that he is in truth taking a corpse, the shadow of smoke, a phantom in all other respects. Philoctetes* 946-947). Why does Philoctetes refer to himself as a "corpse", a "shadow", or a "phantom"? This sentiment appears again when he addresses Odysseus in line 1018, where he refers to himself as "*ἐν ζῶσιν νεκρόν*", literally a "living corpse." It cannot indicate that he is unfeeling or a zombie. After all, he shows moments of great anger and emotion even after

occasionally expressing his hopelessness, such as in this passage.[54] He does, however, see himself as a corpse, which is reflected in this passage from *The Things they Carried*:

> *'Anyway,' Rat said, 'the days aren't so bad, but at night the pictures get to be a bitch. I start seeing my own body. Chunks of myself. My own heart, my own kidneys. It's like—I don't know—it's like staring into this huge black crystal ball. One of these nights I'll be lying dead out there in the dark and nobody'll find me except the bugs—I can see it—I can see the goddamn bugs chewing tunnels through me—I can see the mongooses munching on my bones. I swear it's too much. I can't keep seeing myself dead.'*
>
> […] *He said he'd done his best. He'd tried to be a decent medic. Win some and lose some, he said, but he'd tried hard. Briefly then, rambling a little, he talked about a few of the guys who were gone now, Curt Lemon and Kiowa and Ted Lavender, and how crazy it was that people who were so incredibly alive could get so incredibly dead.*
>
> *Then he almost laughed.*
>
> *'This whole war,' he said. 'You know what it is? Just one big banquet. Meat, man. You and me. Everybody. Meat for the bugs.'*
>
> *The next morning he shot himself.*
>
> *He took off his boots and socks, laid out his medical kit, doped himself up, and put a round through his foot.*
>
> *Nobody blamed him, Sanders said* (O'Brien 1990, 223).[55]

The mention of Rat's former war companions links his symptoms with the loss of a special comrade, and so does Philoctetes' occasional allusion to the death of Heracles. Near the end of the play, shortly before line 1207, in which he expressed his desire to kill himself, he sees himself as a corpse from the perspective of animals, just as Rat did: "*νῦν καλὸν/ἀντίφονον κορέσαι στόμα πρὸς χάριν/ἐμᾶς σαρκὸς αἰόλας*" ([Addressing birds of prey] *Now it is right for you to sate your mouth with blood for blood, to sate your mouth on my discolored flesh. Philoctetes* 1155-1157). Just as in the passage from *The Things*

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[54] Philoctetes' emotional oscillation can be explained through what Herman calls the "dialectic of trauma." She explains this with the following: "Balance is precisely what the traumatized person lacks. She finds herself caught between the extremes of amnesia or of reliving the trauma, between floods of intense, overwhelming feeling and arid states of no feeling at all, between irritable, impulsive action and complete inhibition of action. The instability produced by these periodic alternations further exacerbates the traumatized person's sense of unpredictability and helplessness. The dialectic of trauma is therefore potentially self-perpetuating" (Herman 47).

[55] Rat is, in fact, also the same person who shot the baby water buffalo in a passage outlined in Chapter 2.

they Carried, this thought is followed by self-destructive behavior (as shown by line 1207). Thus the play shows the pattern of the trauma of losing one's comrade, followed by seeing one's self as a corpse and displaying tendencies towards self-harm.

The play also repeatedly shows Philoctetes' anxieties over his previous social relationships. Having been abandoned on Lemnos for ten years, Philoctetes has had no idea what happened to his friends and family. Occasionally in the play, the audience hears references to Poeas, Philoctetes' father, and at times Philoctetes thinks that he is surely long dead (*Philoctetes* 1213-1214), and at other times still he has hopes that he is still alive, waiting for him, as he does when he tells Neoptolemus that he will receive his father's gratitude for returning him home (*Philoctetes* 1371). A modern reader could imagine Poeas' anxiety at Philoctetes' absence, and Philoctetes' own concern for his father as analogous to that of the soldier and his mother in this passage concerning the safe return of a World War I soldier:

> *Her worries increased when, in July 1915, Eric finally received his much longed-for transfer to the RFC as an observer. He knew this would cause her pain: 'Mum bears it all so well but I cannot imagine what she suffers. She doesn't sleep well and somehow it is too awful to think of her suffering.' His mother, however, had concealed from him the true extent of her anxiety. She was convinced that Eric would not survive the war, but 'I did not tell him of my great dread.' '[F]rom now on', she recalled, 'the anxiety was terrible'* (Roper 2009, 85-86).

Some of the ancient audience members could also no doubt have related to Poeas. Barely four years earlier, the Athenians had received news of the destruction of the Sicilian expedition, and Thucydides noted that "*ἐς δὲ τὰς Ἀθήνας ἐπειδὴ ἠγγέλθη, ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν ἠπίστουν καὶ τοῖς πάνυ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔργου διαπεφευγόσι καὶ σαφῶς ἀγγέλλουσι, μὴ οὕτω γε ἅγαν πανσυδὶ διεφθάρθαι*" (*When it was announced to the Athenians, they mostly disbelieved entirely those of the soldiers who escaped from the*

very same event and clearly announced it, the utter destruction being thus not possible. History of the Peloponnesian War 8.1.1). Herodotus, too, was aware of the pain that war caused the parents who stayed at home when he included the following quote from Croesus: "*οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτω ἀνόητος ἐστὶ ὅστις πόλεμον πρὸ εἰρήνης αἱρέεται: ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ οἱ παῖδες τοὺς πατέρας θάπτουσι, ἐν δὲ τῷ οἱ πατέρες τοὺς παῖδας. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα δαίμοσί κου φίλον ἦν οὕτω γενέσθαι*" (*For there is no one so foolish who would choose war instead of peace: for in the latter, children bury their fathers, but in the former, fathers bury their sons. But I suppose these things are pleasing to the gods to be. Histories* 1.87.4). In other tragedies, too, the playwright draws attention to the suffering of those who wait for soldiers to return home. A choral passage from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* comments on it with "*ὁ χρυσαμοιβὸς δ' Ἄρης σωμάτων/καὶ ταλαντοῦχος ἐν μάχῃ δορὸς/πυρωθὲν ἐξ Ἰλίου/φίλοισι πέμπει βαρὺ/ψῆγμα δυσδάκρυτον ἀν/τήνορος σποδοῦ γεμί/ζων λέβητας εὐθέτους*" (*Ares exchanges gold for bodies and tips the scale in the spear-battle and sends heavy ashes burned up and much wept over from Ilium to their loved ones, furnishing urns well with dust instead of men. Agamemnon* 438-444). Greek authors were keenly aware of the emotions of the population who stayed in the city during wartime. *Philoctetes* itself is also reflective of this.

Poeas is not the only person about whom Philoctetes is concerned. As soon as Neoptolemus begins to explain how he was wronged by the *Atreidae* and Odysseus, Philoctetes interrupts him when he mentions the death of Achilles (*Philoctetes* 331), and exclaims, "*οἴμοι: φράσῃς μοι μὴ πέρα, πρὶν ἂν μάθω/πρῶτον τόδ', ἦ τέθνηχ' ὁ Πηλέως γόνος;*" (*Alas, may you not speak further before I first learn this: has the progeny of Peleus truly died? Philoctetes* 332-33). When he hears that this is indeed the case, it is

not much later that he also hears of the death of Ajax (*Philoctetes* 412), and then inquires, "*οὐ παλαιὸς κἀγαθὸς φίλος τ' ἐμός,/Νέστωρ ὁ Πύλιος, ἔστιν;*" (*Is my old and good friend Nestor of Pylos no longer? Philoctetes* 421-422), and then again "*ποῦ γὰρ ἦν ἐνταῦθά σοι/Πάτροκλος, ὃς σοῦ πατρὸς ἦν τὰ φίλτατα;*" (*Where was Patroclus for you at the time, he who was so loved by your father? Philoctetes* 433-434). The reason for Philoctetes' anxiety about his father and the status of all of his old companions is rooted in the trauma caused by betrayal. Herman outlines this anxious need for reassurance: "Having once experienced the sense of total isolation, the survivor is intensely aware of the fragility of all human connections in the face of danger. She needs clear and explicit assurance that she will not be abandoned once again" (Herman 1992, 61-62). In this same way, Philoctetes is hoping for assurance that he has not been abandoned by the disappearance of his friends and family. Shay claims that grieving for the loss of these relationships is a significant step in a veteran's course to healing through constructing a narrative. He says that, in this step, "They grieve not only for comrades lost during and since the war, but almost always for irretrievable losses of prewar relationships, with parents, siblings, wives, and children" (Shay 2002, 174). For Philoctetes, however, he has no trustworthy community to grieve with as a form of support, which is necessary for this step in the healing process (Shay 2002, 173-174). Thus his anxiety continues until the conditions for his reintegration into the Greek army are met, which will be discussed later.

These anxieties of Philoctetes bring up the final, brief point which the play stresses about his emotional state: Philoctetes is constantly in a state of great vulnerability. In fact, throughout the play, he needs reassurance that he will not be abandoned again, not just symbolically by the deaths of his friends and family, but also

literally by the people who have come to his island. This first shows up when he bemoans how no sailor who came to his island ever was willing to take him off the island with him: "*ἐκεῖνο δ' οὐδείς, ἡνίκ' ἂν μνησθῶ, θέλει,/σῶσαί μ' ἐς οἴκους*" (*No one, when I mentioned it, was willing to do that—to bring me safely home. Philoctetes* 310-311). Then, throughout the play, there are many times when Philoctetes desperately begs Neoptolemus and his subordinates not to abandon him. First, when Neoptolemus claims that it is time for him to depart, Philoctetes urgently stops him, begging, "*πρός νύν σε πατρὸς πρός τε μητρός, ὦ τέκνον,/πρός τ' εἴ τί σοι κατ' οἶκόν ἐστι προσφιλές,ἱκέτης ἱκνοῦμαι, μὴ λίπῃς μ' οὕτω μόνον*" (*Child, now, by your father and mother, and by anything that is dear to you in your home, do not leave me thus alone. Philoctetes* 468-470). This is the first explicit plea not to be abandoned which Philoctetes gives, but there are two other, even more striking ones. The first happens after the first attack of his disease which the audience is shown. When Neoptolemus asks what he should do, Philoctetes' immediate reply is not to ask for the medicine which he has been using to soothe his injury,[56] but rather he says, "*μή με ταρβήσας προδῷς*" (*Fearing me, do not abandon* [or: betray] *me. Philoctetes* 757). This indicates that his primary fear is not about the physical pain of his disease, but the prospect of being abandoned once again.[57]

[56] The audience knows for a fact that Philoctetes had medicine to soothe his injury which he could have directed Neoptolemus to pick up. As they are about to depart, Philoctetes goes to his cave to retrieve some things. Neoptolemus questions what he could possibly need, and he responds that "*φύλλον τί μοι πάρεστιν, ᾧ μάλιστ' ἀεὶ/κοιμῶ τόδ' ἕλκος, ὥστε πραΰνειν πάνυ*" (*I have a certain herb, with which I always calm this wound as much as possible, until it abates entirely. Philoctetes* 649-650). Yet, following this line, there is no indication that either character has this herb or uses it when Philoctetes has his attacks.

[57] There is a certain amount of evidence to suggest that the physical pain of Philoctetes' injury is allegory for the psychological pain of his trauma. The attacks of pain are simultaneous with his anxieties that he may be abandoned, as discussed here, and also with his thoughts of suicide, as discussed prior. Furthermore, the ability to have his physical injury healed is coincident with his reestablishment of trust and reintegration into the community, which are necessary for the relief of trauma in war veterans. This will be discussed in the third and final section of this chapter, when the play's portrayal of the healing of trauma is the focus. See page 80.

Finally, and most strikingly, after he has lost his trust for Neoptolemus and only the chorus remains with him, he urges them to leave in his anger, saying, "*ἀπό νύν με λείπετ' ἤδη*" (*Leave me now already. Philoctetes* 1177), to which the chorus responds, "*φίλα μοι, φίλα ταῦτα παρήγγειλας ἑκόντι τε πράσσειν./ἴωμεν ἴωμεν/ναὸς ἵν' ἡμῖν τέτακται*" (*Welcome to me, welcome are these things you bid and I am willing to do. Let us go, let us go, to the part of the ship for us to arrange on. Philoctetes* 1178-1180). Immediately after this line is spoken, Philoctetes cries out, "*μή, πρὸς ἀραίου Διός, ἔλθῃς, ἱκετεύω*" (*Do not go, by Zeus who answers prayers, I beg you. Philoctetes* 1181). It is then revealed that his foot is causing him pain again, but the audience is not made aware of this for a few more lines. Instead, the interaction makes it seem as though the chorus' readiness to leave triggered this reaction in Philoctetes.

These lines reflect upon the fact that the survivor of trauma is anxious that they might experience the same betrayal and destruction of trust once more. As Herman mentioned, the survivor of trauma needs clear, explicit assurance that they will not once again be abandoned (Herman 1992, 62). The main problem which afflicts Philoctetes in the previous lines are his capacity for trust, and how the betrayal has forced certain assumptions on him—namely, that someone's momentary departure could mean abandonment, thus why he immediately asked Neoptolemus not to leave him during his attack, before all else. Because his trust has been broken—multiple times, in fact, by the second half of the play—he constantly feels the distress of abandonment. One survivor of trauma defines trust as the following: "Trust is being able to believe in what people say—that they won't lie to me, that I can count on their doing what they say they are going to do and not do what is unexpected. Trust is believing that people won't harm me

intentionally" (Rosenbloom, Williams, and Watkins 1999, 143). Because Philoctetes does not have this trust, he continues to re-experience trauma.

Philoctetes' companionship with Neoptolemus, and closure with Heracles

How can Philoctetes regain his trust of others, and be reintegrated into the community of the Greek army to be physically and psychologically healed? The play provides an answer to this. By enabling a soldier to trust others once again, he can be brought back into a more comfortable, safer world. The play shows how this can be done in two major ways: first, the soldier gains mutual understanding and trust with another person, and second, he obtains closure with his dead companions.

The person who manages to gain mutual understanding from Philoctetes is Neoptolemus. There is an immediate connection between the two characters which goes beyond Philoctetes' simple respect for Achilles. In fact, they must have a deeper connection than that in order for Philoctetes to progress to healing. As a counter-example, near the end of the play, the chorus tries to reason with Philoctetes, and use reason to coax him into returning to the Greek army. They sing,

> *πρὸς θεῶν, εἴ τι σέβει ξένον, πέλασσον,*
> *εὐνοίᾳ πάσᾳ πελάταν:*
> *ἀλλὰ γνῶθ', εὖ γνῶθ' ἐπὶ σοὶ*
> *κῆρα τάνδ' ἀποφεύγειν.*
> *οἰκτρὰ γὰρ βόσκειν, ἀδαὴς δ'*
> *ἔχειν μυρίον ἄχθος ὃ ξυνοικεῖ.*
>
> *By the gods, if you have any good regard for a friendly stranger, approach him,*
> *Him who approached in return with entirely kindly thought:*
> *Rather consider, consider well that it is in your power*
> *To escape from this doom.*[58]
> *It is lamentable to feed it, and a man does not know*

[58] The careful use of the word "*κῆρ*" (doom or bane) here is suggestive. Superficially, the chorus appears to be referring to the physical injury of the snake bite. On the other hand, the word is vague enough to suggest that Philoctetes' doom may be the isolation which he has experienced and which will follow him if he does not reach out to anyone.

> *How to bear the immeasurable woe which accompanies it* (*Philoctetes* 1163-1169).

The chorus' advice is reasonable, and yet it does not work in convincing Philoctetes. Austin comments that Philoctetes' obstinate refusal after this rational plea is surprising, and says, "The chorus had seemed to be making some headway as the *kommos* proceeded, but in the end its best counsels could not penetrate the patient's defense. The chorus and Philoctetes might appear to understand each other on the surface, but at the deeper levels of the psyche they were deaf to each other. […] Going nowhere, though it might seem to us a flaw in the dramatic structure, may have been Sophocles' intention. We are asked to concentrate on a case that goes nowhere" (Austin 2011, 173). The chorus' method fails because of their inability to truly relate with Philoctetes on a personal, emotional level, and also because of his inability to relate to them in these same ways.

Neoptolemus does manage to regain Philoctetes' trust at the end of the play. There must therefore be some quality which he has that allows the two to connect. The first, most obvious connection between the two of them is their occupations as warriors. Other soldiers can provide a special degree of support to their comrades, as support which is (at least initially) impossible for other individuals to give. Shay explains the help the support of others who have been through war can give, that

> *While most VIP veterans are also in individual psychotherapy and request medications, the heart and soul of the program is its group therapies and the ideas and rituals of the VIP veteran community. The core idea is 'You are not alone; you don't have to go through it alone.' From the beginning, other veterans provide what military social scientist and historian Faris Kirkland and his Army colleagues called 'substantive validation,' a knowledgeable audience (even if they were not in the same specific units or operations), to whom the veteran's experience matters, and who are able to support him through the confusion,*

> *doubt, and self-criticism that seem intrinsic to having survived the chaos of battle* (Shay 2002, 168).

It is objectionable to suggest that this would be the only reason why Philoctetes and Neoptolemus reach an understanding. After all, the chorus were also comprised of soldiers who were likely even more experienced than Neoptolemus. Yet their rational pleas did not sway Philoctetes in any meaningful way. The fact that they are also soldiers, however, does give him some reason to listen to them.

The connection between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes must be deeper than their mutual occupations as warriors. The audience learns a few facts about Neoptolemus which suggest this deeper connection. First, Odysseus informs them of a bit of his background when addressing Neoptolemus: "*σὺ μὲν πέπλευκας οὔτ' ἔνορκος οὐδενὶ/οὔτ' ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὔτε τοῦ πρώτου στόλου:/ἐμοὶ δὲ τούτων οὐδέν ἐστ' ἀρνήσιμον*" (*You did not sail under oath to anyone, nor by necessity, nor were you on the first expedition: none of these things are to be denied by me. Philoctetes* 72-74). This immediately separates him from the rest of the characters who have come to the island. He is a new entity, and thus does not have the stigma attached to him of being complicit in Philoctetes' abandonment. Even the warriors whom Philoctetes esteemed did not return at any time to rescue him from the island. The members of the chorus had been on the original expedition, being comprised of the Myrmidons who originally followed Achilles (Austin 34). Neoptolemus then has an advantage over others in gaining Philoctetes' trust.

The other major fact which would have made the two characters understand each other easily is Neoptolemus' loss of his father. He also is privy to the experience of being left behind due to the Trojan War. When Neoptolemus gives Philoctetes the story of how he came to be part of the Greek army, he gives his motives for joining them by saying

"*ταῦτ', ὦ ξέν', οὕτως ἐννέποντες οὐ πολὺν/χρόνον μ' ἐπέσχον μή με ναυστολεῖν ταχύ,/μάλιστα μὲν δὴ τοῦ θανόντος ἱμέρῳ,/ὅπως ἴδοιμ' ἄθαπτον: οὐ γὰρ εἰδόμην*" (*Saying these things thus* [that only he could put an end to Troy], *oh friend, they did not bar me very long from sailing on the expedition quickly, most of all out of a longing for the dead* [Achilles], *that I might see him unburied: for I had not seen him before. Philoctetes* 348-351). One might object with this as evidence for Neoptolemus' longing for his father from the fact that this speech is used to deceive Philoctetes and gain his initial trust. These particular lines, however, were not part of the story which Odysseus instructed Neoptolemus to use (*Philoctetes* 54-64), and there is no reason to doubt Neoptolemus' claim here. There is, therefore, reason to suspect that Neoptolemus had feelings of loneliness and feelings of abandonment, which Philoctetes could recognize from his story.[59] The grief which Philoctetes feels also affects Neoptolemus particularly, as evidenced by these lines, delivered after he hears Philoctetes' angry rebuke at him for his betrayal: "*ἐμοὶ μὲν οἶκτος δεινὸς ἐμπέπτωκέ τις/τοῦδ' ἀνδρὸς οὐ νῦν πρῶτον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλαι*" (*Some strange pity for this man has fallen upon me, not now for the first time, but long ago, in fact. Philoctetes* 963-964). In reaction to this, Philoctetes also holds back some of his malice, and takes a more moderate stance against him, saying, "*οὐκ εἶ κακὸς σύ, πρὸς κακῶν δ' ἀνδρῶν μαθὼν/ἔοικας ἥκειν αἰσχρά*" (*You are not bad, but having learned from bad men you appear to arrive at shameful deeds. Philoctetes* 971-972). Thus the audience sees even in the midst of betrayal, the two characters still have an understanding for one another, an understanding which is not shared by the chorus.

[59] For more information on the father-son motif between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, and also Philoctetes and Heracles, see Avery, 1965.

After he regains Philoctetes' trust by returning Heracles' bow to him, Neoptolemus urges him one final time to return to Troy. Just as in the case with the chorus, he uses reasoning and points out that this will heal Philoctetes' injury. He assures him that "*καλὴ γὰρ ἡ 'πίκτησις, Ἑλλήνων ἕνα/κριθέντ' ἄριστον τοῦτο μὲν παιωνίας/εἰς χεῖρας ἐλθεῖν, εἶτα τὴν πολύστονον/Τροίαν ἑλόντα κλέος ὑπέρτατον λαβεῖν*" (*This is a wonderful thing to gain, being chosen as the one best man of the Greeks to come to healing hands, and then, having taken Troy which causes mourning, to seize the highest glory. Philoctetes* 1344-1347). This time, his reasoning seems to have an effect, as Philoctetes is briefly conflicted, and almost considers going to Troy: "*οἴμοι, τί δράσω; πῶς ἀπιστήσω λόγοις/τοῖς τοῦδ', ὃς εὔνους ὢν ἐμοὶ παρήνεσεν;*" (*Ah me, what shall I do? How will I disobey his words, being someone who advises me wishing me well? Philoctetes* 1350-1351). So it appears that trust and understanding can lead to healing, as it begins to lead Philoctetes to the people who may heal him.[60]

Philoctetes refuses to go with him, of course. As someone who truly understands Philoctetes' plight, Neoptolemus at last consents to his demand to take him home. Philoctetes only finishes his path to healing after the second condition for his emotional healing is met—that is, closure with his dead companion, Heracles. A trauma survivor can often feel severe symptoms due to the loss of their companions, and especially if they see their death personally. In the case of Philoctetes, he personally killed Heracles out of mercy (*Philoctetes* 799-803). The trauma of being forced to kill one's companion would necessarily be quite severe. The grief of a soldier who loses a dear comrade-in-arms is

[60] In this case, the audience finds yet another innovation by the playwright, in that Neoptolemus is not villainized. The tradition of the character of Neoptolemus is complicated, but some works (such as Euripides' earlier play *Andromache*, and later Vergil's *Aeneid*) portray him in a more negative light. Here, Sophocles makes use of the character for his own purposes, to make the perfect companion for Philoctetes.

something clearly beyond the understanding of those who have not experienced it, but here is a particular observation by Shay which is especially relevant to the play: "We often hear that the death of a special friend-in-arms broke the survivor's life into unhealable halves, with everything before his death radically severed from everything after" (Shay 1994, 39). This is true also for Philoctetes: before the death of Heracles, he is only known from mythology as the person who killed Heracles out of mercy. After Heracles dies, he is known as the Greek soldier who was wounded by a snake and abandoned on Lemnos.

Due to the lack of explicit references to his feelings about Heracles during the play, it is difficult to pinpoint Philoctetes' exact feelings about his death. A few lines, however, suggest the appearance of Heracles as an idealized fantasy of what the survivor needs to hear from his dead comrade. First, after boasting briefly about his own life and accomplishments, Heracles tells Philoctetes in turn to "*καὶ σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν,/ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον*" (*Know well, this also ought to happen to you, that you build a good, glorious life from your sufferings. Philoctetes* 1421-1422). He even confirms to him the importance of his companion, Neoptolemus, in the happiness of his new life: "*ἀλλ' ὡς λέοντε συννόμω*[61] *φυλάσσετον/οὗτος σὲ καὶ σὺ τόνδ'*" (*But just as two lions who are partnered, you two watch over each other, this one watching over you, and you over him. Philoctetes* 1436-137). The only words Philoctetes says to Heracles after hearing his urge to go to Troy and be healed are the following: "*ὦ φθέγμα ποθεινὸν ἐμοὶ πέμψας,/χρόνιός τε φανείς,/οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις*" (*Oh you, having sent to me the voice I yearned for, and having appeared after a long time, I will not disobey your*

[61] "*λέοντε συννόμω*" is a dual form, which here emphasizes the close connection between the two companions.

words. Philoctetes 1444-1446). It is hardly surprising that Philoctetes yearned to hear his voice, and would not disobey his commands. The middle line, however, "*χρόνιός τε φανείς*," "having appeared after a long time", makes it appear that Philoctetes had been missing Heracles for a long time, thus showing his remembrance for him. To compare, Shay outlines an outsider's perspective on veterans' devotions to their dead comrades: "Bewildered families, hurt and feeling cheated by the amount of energy their veterans pour into dead comrades, apparently do not realize that to forget the dead dishonors the living veteran. […] Many a well-meaning therapist has stumbled onto an exploding land mine of rage from a veteran by making the well-intended, supportive remark, 'You don't have to feel guilty about that'" (Shay 2002, 80). Of course, they do not need to feel guilt over their companions' deaths, but the survivors do not want to hear that from others—they want to hear that from the dead.

Of course, the dead cannot speak to them, to assure them that they want them to be happy. Closure with the dead, however, may help the survivors to achieve catharsis. They do not forget the dead in doing so; they no longer sacrifice their own happiness as tribute by doing so. Michael Viehman's powerful story of his visit to The Wall, a memorial of those who died in Vietnam, shows this effect. He starts his account with feelings of self-deprecation, saying "That medal which I received, I never felt I deserved. You see…so many of my Brothers died—or worse…and never got one. I was nobody…nuthin'…and I was NOT deserving" (Quoted in Shay 2002, 178-179). A little while after, when "the dam broke", he says, "My dead Brothers watched and I could feel their concern—for me….I finally took my boots an' stuff and placed them at the panel with respect and tried to lay part of my life to rest. Never to forget…but, perchance, to

move forward…I could feel my Brothers watching—I shit you not" (Quoted in Shay 2002, 179). Philoctetes' emotional, final reunion with Heracles parallels this veteran's encounter with The Wall. The dead Heracles shows his concern for the living, suffering Philoctetes, and this encounter allows Philoctetes to move forward. As the play closes, Philoctetes delivers his final, jubilant lines which signify a new, hopeful chapter in his life:

> *νῦν δ', ὦ κρῆναι Λύκιόν τε ποτόν,*
> *λείπομεν ὑμᾶς, λείπομεν ἤδη*
> *δόξης οὔ ποτε τῆσδ' ἐπιβάντες.*
> *χαῖρ', ὦ Λήμνου πέδον ἀμφίαλον,*
> *καί μ' εὐπλοίᾳ πέμψον ἀμέμπτως,*
> *ἔνθ' ἡ μεγάλη Μοῖρα κομίζει*
> *γνώμη τε φίλων χὠ πανδαμάτωρ*
> *δαίμων, ὃς ταῦτ' ἐπέκρανεν.*
>
> *Now, oh springs and Lycian drink,*
> *We leave you, we leave now not ever*
> *Having entered upon that hope before.*
> *Rejoice, oh sea-girt land of Lemnos,*
> *And send me on a voyage without reproach,*
> *Where great Fate and the advice of my friends*
> *Arranges me, and so does the all-subduing god,*
> *Who brings these things to pass* (*Philoctetes* 1461-1468).

With the pronouncement of "*φίλων*", Philoctetes places Neoptolemus alongside Heracles as his companion, and solidifies the trust between them. He has a companion to support him, and will be reintegrated into Greek society.

Thus, with the play's end comes its message for the audience: even after the isolation and distress which trauma and betrayal create, there is hope for a better future once the survivor reaches out for help and receives closure with the dead. While some traditions (such as the one which Vergil uses for his *Aeneid*, and Euripides uses in *Andromache*) reveal that the troubles of Neoptolemus may not have ended at the end of

this play, the tradition gives no indication that Philoctetes continued to suffer afterwards. In any case, his was the predicament that would have resonated with the Athenian audience. Some Athenians may have felt left behind by the friends and family who died of the plague, or died in the war and especially during the Sicilian expedition. Some of those Athenians may have seen those deaths personally, in the battlefield. Others may have felt betrayed by the politicians who encouraged the war, or those who overthrew the democracy in favor of oligarchy in 411. For all of these people, *Philoctetes* had a powerful, hopeful message.

Chapter Four: Athenian Theater's Therapeutic Effect

Shay's work has influenced Classical scholars to re-examine ancient works in the light of war trauma. *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, however, have been relatively neglected when compared to Thucydides' work and the epics. This is especially strange considering that these two plays were recently the main focus of a theater-based social outreach group known as *Beyond the Wire*. The goal of their *Theater of War* project is to present readings of the aforementioned plays to veterans and their families in the U.S. and Europe. Their reasoning behind this choice is rooted in Shay's 1995 article, "The Birth of Tragedy—Out of the Needs of Stagecraft", which they reference when they say, "It has been suggested that ancient Greek drama was a form of storytelling, communal therapy, and ritual reintegration for combat veterans by combat veterans."[62] I suggest that comparative evidence from psychodrama and dramatherapy can attest to this. Furthermore, *Theater of War*'s readings contain elements from both of these fields, and have profound cathartic effects on modern war veterans who hear them. This carries the implication that the Athenian theater moved its audience of war veterans in a similar way.

In order to prove this hypothesis, I will begin with a short examination into the layout of the Athenian theater itself, and the role which the chorus plays within it. These will be compared to elements of the field of psychodrama in order to show the therapeutic benefit of Athenian drama. Next, I will discuss the importance of the use of

[62] http://www.outsidethewirellc.com/projects/theater-of-war/overview, 2011. Accessed March, 2014. cf. Shay, 1995, whose conclusion was that "Theater was this community's primary means of reintegrating the returning veteran into the social sphere as Citizen."

metaphor and allegory in Greek tragedy. Phrynicus' *Capture of Miletus* will be used as an example of why a straightforward approach to the city's grief is not effective. This aspect of Athenian drama will be compared to dramatherapy to show why metaphor is useful in approaching traumatic issues. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an examination into Meineck's review of a *Theater of War* production. This will show that this production shares elements which are present in psychodrama and dramatherapy. More importantly, this can give insight into how the productions of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* would have affected the Athenian audience.

The Space of the ancient theater and its connection with psychodrama

The layout of the ancient Athenian theater enables a more communal experience on the part of the audience, just as the layout of psychodramatic stages do. In fact, the Athenian theater differs greatly from typical modern stages. The shape of the theater itself reflects a more communal experience: instead of seats which face the stage arranged in a rectangular format, the amphitheater formed a semi-circle around the stage, with its two ends facing each other (Goldhill 2007, 8). This means that a considerable number of individuals would see not only the stage, but also other audience members across from them. Shay takes this to mean that, since the performances took place in the daylight, "Members of the audience could see and hear each other's reactions to the plays" (Shay 1995). This set-up intensifies the relationship of audience members with each other while they watch the performances and allows them to share their feelings and reactions on both a conscious and unconscious level, during and after the performances. The significance of audience members sharing their feelings about the performance becomes greater in the context of psychodrama, which shall be expanded upon later. It is,

however, worth mentioning that the sharing of experience is important to psychological relief.[63]

It would be prudent at this point to discuss Aristotle's famous quote on the purpose of tragedy. In his *Poetics*, he claims that "*ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν*" (*Tragedy, then, is the mimicry of earnest and complete action which has greatness, which is separately in parts of the play by means of each sweetened word, is a mimicry of men doing things and not in narrative, and through pity and fear accomplishes a relief of these emotions*. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b). The true meaning of Aristotle's "*κάθαρσιν*" at the end of the sentence is up to interpretation, but the word generally refers to some form of purification, which, in ancient Greek society, was rooted in ritual. For Athens, Dyer makes the claim that they "had a system of purification ritual, based in some way on Delphic Apollo" (Dyer 1969, 43). He attributes these rituals as Apolline in origin, specifically pointing to the god's aspect as "Apollo Καθάρσιος" (Dyer 1969, 41), in whose title Aristotle's comment on *κάθαρσις* is reflected. These rituals were focused on the purification of metaphysical taint which would be acquired through a variety of means.[64] What Greek tragedy displays, however, is a purification of emotions and psychological troubles, not the aforementioned metaphysical pollution. As one might expect, this also indicates that ancient Greek tragedy has a ritualistic component to its production. In fact, Greek drama, as a part of a religious

[63] See e.g. Herman 1992, 175, in which she details how the reconstruction of the traumatic event as narrative is stage of recovery.

[64] See Robert Parker's *Miasma* (1983) for a thorough examination in ancient Greek purification beliefs.

festival designed in worship of Dionysus, does contain characteristics which define it more closely as "ritual-drama" rather than the modern definition of drama. Csapo and Miller state outright that "Today's less teleologically inclined Hellenists would seem to place Greek drama closer to ritual-drama, leaving the invention of 'drama as we know it' to the Renaissance or later. It can be argued that the strongly ritual character of Greek drama has long been obscured by successive appropriations of the Greek dramatic genres as models and genotypes, exercises designed to obfuscate their differences" (Csapo and Miller 2007, 4). With the exception of the psychodrama techniques which will be explored later,[65] today's drama does not have the ritualistic context which ancient Greek drama did.

The tragedy's chorus takes center stage on both the question of audience participation and also ritualistic components in ancient Greek tragedy. In *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, the chorus passively receives and comments upon the events which the main actors experience more directly. It is only occasionally, as in plays such as Aeschylus' *Oresteia,* that the chorus takes on a larger role of an active character who has an influence on the plot. The reason for the chorus' passivity in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* is due to their function as representing the Athenian community in the tragedy.[66] The chorus

[65] See page 95.

[66] The chorus' role in tragedy has been fiercely debated, and more caution is required when discussing chorus as a whole in ancient Greek tragedy. Aeschylus and Euripides put it to a different use in their plays, and the relationship between the chorus and the Athenian community becomes more complicated when the chorus contains marginalized members such as women and slaves. Goldhill has criticized two models of viewing the chorus, namely those which claim that it performs the role of an idealized spectator, or that it always represents the people of Athens (Goldhill 2012, 85-86). Still, it is safer to draw this connection between the chorus and the audience in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, since the chorus is made up of soldiers. The audience with which this chapter is concerned are likewise the veterans who would have viewed the plays. Furthermore, Goldhill admits that "Whatever variations of relationship between chorus and actors any play develops […] the chorus acts as a collective, and mobilizes ideas of communality" (Goldhill 2012, 86). This point, that the chorus represents community actions and thought in relationship to the individual actor's role, is essential when comparing it to the role of outside members and auxiliaries in relationship to the protagonist in psychodrama. See page 95.

expresses the emotions typically expected of the community (shown, for example, by their initial pity for Philoctetes and their anxiety and disbelief at Ajax's slaughter of the herds), and bring in the ritual aspect of the city's festival into the action of the play. Note, for example, in *Ajax* where their reaction to Ajax's reassurance is an ode to Pan: "*ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι, περιχαρὴς δ' ἀνεπτόμαν./ἰὼ ἰὼ Πὰν Πάν,/ὦ Πὰν Πὰν ἁλίπλαγκτε, Κυλλανίας χιονοκτύπου/πετραίας ἀπὸ δειράδος φάνηθ'*" (*I bristle with love, surrounded by grace I fly off. Oh oh Pan Pan, oh Pan Pan who roams the sea, appear from your stony snow-beaten ridge from Cyllene. Ajax* 693-696). These sorts of ritual invocations of the gods are widespread throughout tragedy, and quoting Easterling, Csapo and Miller take this a step further. They say, "It can indeed be said that 'there is hardly any choral lyric that is entirely without [ritual] associations'" (Csapo and Miller 2007, 6).

There is also metatheatrical evidence for the relationship between the chorus and the audience. The chorus itself was selected from volunteer Athenian citizens, and the amount of demand for members of each play and dithyrambic competition would put annual participation at just under 5,000 people (Csapo and Miller 2007, 5). This would indicate that most male citizens would at some point participate in a dramatic chorus at some point in their life (ibid.). In addition to this, the physical layout of the Greek theater shows the chorus' significance. From the audience's seating arrangement, the component of the stage which is closest to them would be the *orchestra*. The *orchestra* is the section reserved for the chorus on the Greek stage when they perform their songs and dances (Goldhill 2007, 8). Behind the *orchestra*, a low stage in front of the *skene* (the stage building) was used for the actors to perform. The audience and the actors are thus situated at opposite ends of the theater, while the chorus stands in between the two sections. This

puts the chorus in the ideal position to act as a representative of the audience in the world of the drama, and Csapo and Miller claim that this concept of the chorus' role is "as old as Schlegel" (Csapo and Miller 2007, 5).

The psychodramatic stage is likewise constructed in order to create a communal experience, and the concept itself even contains its own ritualistic and cathartic elements. Its formatting of space—what the stage should be, where the actors should be on the stage, etc.—is the first instrument used in its therapeutic process (Wilkins 1999, 20). Moreno's first conception of the psychodramatic stage was a three-tiered balcony in which each level could represent a different phase in psychological development (ibid.). More common in the use of modern psychodramatists, however, is a circular-focused stage. In this version, the main action takes place on the stage with the audience completely surrounding it. Wilkins notes, "Because we sit together in a circle, and the action takes place in the middle of the group, this then acts as a symbolic holder of the protagonist and the drama. Sometimes, as the scene changes or the emotional intensity heightens, at the expressed wish of the protagonist, the action moves to another part of the room" (Wilkins 1999, 21). The Athenian theater, though not completely circular, at least used a semi-circular form for the seating of the audience. In both cases, the stage is physically and dramatically the center of the action.

The human element in psychodrama is only slightly different from that of Greek drama. The psychodrama is the enactment of a particular experience of the protagonist, on whom the drama's therapeutic goals are mainly focused. The protagonist can be helped by an auxiliary or two, who may play the roles of some other important individuals in the event (this might correlate to a Tecmessa or an Odysseus). The director

helps guide the protagonist in his or her enactment, and keeps the drama in order (Wilkins 1999, 22). Finally, the audience watches the drama, but unlike the modern theater audience, this audience must take an active role in the drama. It is more closely analogous to the Athenian chorus than anything else. Wilkins describes their role: "The psychodrama audience serves not only the function of supporting the protagonist but is itself engaged in the therapeutic process. The protagonist's story may awaken issues for members of the audience and identification with the protagonist (or even one of the auxiliaries) may bring catharsis or insight" (Wilkins 1999, 28). In Athenian drama, this may be separated by one stage of involvement, where the audience achieves catharsis through their own resonation with the chorus' response to the main actors.

An important part of the psychodrama's therapeutic process is the "sharing" episode which takes place after the enacted drama. In a twist on the usual dramatic format, the audience shares their feelings about the event while the protagonist listens. "Audience", in this case, also includes the auxiliaries, who are chosen for their role from the larger audience. Wilkins notes that this is an opportunity for the auxiliaries to remove themselves from the acting role and return to their selves again, and even points out that "Sometimes this is done almost ritually, especially if the role has been difficult or auxiliaries find it hard to free themselves" (Wilkins 1999, 103). Once again the concept of "ritual" is cited in relation to drama. The whole dramatic process is rooted in ritual, and there is even a moment that resembles a "purification" process. One auxiliary, for example, was asked to "shake herself loose", physically, of the role she had been playing once the sharing stage had begun (Wilkins 1999, 104).

The main goal of sharing, however, is not for the auxiliaries to de-role themselves, although that is the first step. By asking the audience members in what ways they are like the protagonist, and how the protagonist's drama affected them, it enables a sense of relief for the audience, and reconnects the protagonist with them (Wilkins 1999, 105). Its purpose, then, is similar to the one which Shay attributed to ancient Greek tragedy—that is, the reconnection of individuals with the larger community. Karp states it explicitly, that "Sharing is a time for group catharsis and integration" (Karp 1995, 296). This may be connected to the chorus' final lines in a Greek tragedy, where they leave behind the mythical world and re-enter the world of Athens. This is reflected, for example, in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where the final chorus lines focus on Athens, and not the mythical figures of the play: "*σπονδαὶ δ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐκ μετοίκων/Παλλάδος ἀστοῖς. Ζεὺς ὁ πανόπτας/οὕτω Μοῖρά τε συγκατέβα./ὁλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς*" (*Drink-offerings to all of the dwellers in the cities of Pallas. Zeus who sees all and Fate thus come down to their aid. Sing along with our dances. Eumenides* 1044-1047). Even in *Philoctetes*, the chorus gives a symbolic farewell to the imaginary world of the theater after Philoctetes' own good-bye, singing, "*χωρῶμεν δὴ πάντες ἀολλεῖς,/νύμφαις ἁλίαισιν ἐπευξάμενοι/νόστου σωτῆρας ἱκέσθαι*" (*Let us go all together, praying to the sea nymphs that a safe voyage come to us. Philoctetes* 1469-1471). Karp also saw the similarities between the two processes, and explained part of the purpose of sharing by noting that "Often, as in Greek drama, the audience member is purged by watching the enactment of another's life story" (Karp 1995, 296).

It cannot be forgotten that in psychodrama, while the process of sharing will hopefully procure some benefit for the audience members, the entire process (sharing

included) is done for the benefit of the protagonist. Furthermore, the drama is meant to be a vignette of their personal life, whereas Greek tragedy focuses on mythological stories and very occasionally historical events. Likewise, the focus of a Greek drama is never on the individual who created it. A Sophoclean psychodrama, in other words, would be a spontaneous play about a moment in Sophocles' life, starring Sophocles; it would be something completely unheard of in Athenian drama. Athenian drama's focus is on the collective of Athenian citizens, not any one particular individual. Because of this, its drama needs to be rooted in stories which all of the audience would already be familiar with, such as the Homeric cycle. Thus a playwright such as Sophocles can use the Homeric myths of Ajax and Philoctetes to create war dramas which the audience, having been embroiled in the Peloponnesian War, would have related to.

Phrynicus' *Capture of Miletus* and the need for metaphor in Athenian drama and dramatherapy

If the function of Athenian drama was to address issues which troubled the *polis*, one could then ask why Sophocles did not instead write a play which focused on the events of the Peloponnesian War, which would have more explicitly addressed the Athenians' experience with trauma than *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* did. The answer to this is related to the danger which going too deeply and immediately into a traumatic narrative can bring. In earlier days of PTSD therapy, it was a common belief that the immediate and sudden reconstruction of a traumatic narrative would allow the victim to make a transformation through a sheer and powerful catharsis. Shay, however, points out that "Before safety, self-care, and sobriety have been firmly established, active uncovering of trauma history only retraumatizes the survivor. Recovery from severe combat trauma

more nearly resembles training to run a marathon than cathartic redemption in faith healing" (Shay 1994, 187). Herman notes that this headlong approach is a common mistake for victims and their therapists, second only to the outright avoidance or denial of the traumatic event. She explains that "Patients at times insist upon plunging into graphic, detailed descriptions of their traumatic experiences, in the belief that simply pouring out the story will solve all their problems. At the root of this belief is the fantasy of a violent cathartic cure which will get rid of the trauma once and for all. The patient may imagine a kind of sadomasochistic orgy, in which she will scream, cry, vomit, bleed, die, and be reborn cleansed of the trauma" (Herman 1992, 172). This route of catharsis is not only ineffective, but also dangerous for the victim as it can sometimes cause a recurrence of PTSD symptoms in those who have started their recovery, as one case study showed (Herman 1992, 173).

There is, in fact, a comparison to be made with this approach and the lost tragedy by Phrynicus, the *Capture of Miletus*. At the time of the Ionian revolt, the Persians attacked and captured Miletus to subdue the rebels, and Herodotus describes the Athenian reaction to this event with the following: "*Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν γὰρ δῆλον ἐποίησαν ὑπεραχθεσθέντες τῇ Μιλήτου ἁλώσι τῇ τε ἄλλῃ πολλαχῇ, καὶ δὴ καὶ ποιήσαντι Φρυνίχῳ δρᾶμα Μιλήτου ἅλωσιν καὶ διδάξαντι ἐς δάκρυά τε ἔπεσε τὸ θέητρον, καὶ ἐζημίωσάν μιν ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκήια κακὰ χιλίῃσι δραχμῇσι, καὶ ἐπέταξαν μηδένα χρᾶσθαι τούτῳ τῷ δράματι*" (*The Athenians made it clear that they were in severe grief at the taking of Miletus both in many ways, but also especially at Phrynicus making and directing the drama Capture of Miletus, where the theater both fell to weeping and fined him one thousand drachmae as he brought to their memory terrible events as though they were*

their own, and they ordered that no one make use of this drama. Histories 6.21). This early tragedy could then be seen as something like a failed experiment. It clearly went too deeply into the troubles of the Milesians, which the Athenians considered to be practically the same as their own. Loraux notes the significance of the amnesty applied to this tragedy, and says "Heavily fined and banned from the stage for having introduced in Athenian theater an action that is nothing but suffering for the Athenians, and a family matter—the Ionian family, this family that is also the city, that is in one word the civic identity, this collective self that defines itself by the sphere of what is one's own—by making them recall 'their own misfortunes,' the first of the great tragedians awakens his fellow citizens—for what I like to consider the first time—to the dangers of recalling, when he object of memory is a source of mourning for the civic self" (Loraux 1998, 85). Note the emphasis on the collective used in this analysis. The actual capture of Miletus must have affected each individual personally to different degrees, thus creating the danger of using the narrative of the traumatic event so directly. In psychodrama, the event that the performance focuses on is only directly relevant to one person, and it is therefore easier to establish whether it is safe or not for that person to explore their narrative. Since Athenian drama focuses on a civic collective, it needs to take a softer approach, using metaphor instead of a direct narrative.

While the focus on the protagonist and their personal life separates psychodrama from Greek drama in one of their basic principles, the separation from reality and the metaphoric techniques used in Athenian drama are reminiscent of techniques used in other therapies which are classified more properly as "dramatherapy." This term is broad, and its definition can be given as "the intentional use of drama and/or theater processes to

achieve therapeutic goals."[67] Its broad definition means the inclusion of puppetry, creative art, play, and the ordinary theater process as therapeutic tools. A common link between all of these modes, however, is the usage of metaphor and displacement from the real world through the use of drama. In Phil Jones' dialogue with dramatherapy theorists, he asks Robert Landy about the importance the distance which the "play space" (analogous with the "stage" in theater) affords from real life, to which Landy responds,

> *My work, like that of most all drama therapists, is about working within a frame. That frame is an aesthetic one, shared by all creative arts therapists. The distance created by working within the frame is the essential element that marks both the creative process and the healing potential of an applied art form. When you remove the distance, you no longer are within a representational space. Therefore, drama and play lose their essential aesthetic and healing properties. Play and the play space are frames marked by their degree of distance from reality. When very close to reality, they appear to be real, with potential tragic implications. When very far from reality, they appear stylised and comedic, at the extreme bordering on the absurd and farcical. When balanced between the two poles of reality and fantasy, tragedy and comedy, they serve important functions: to please or enlighten an audience, to heal people who are in pain, for example* (Jones 2010, 44).[68]

In Athenian theater, both comedy and tragedy are set in this ideal distance from reality which Landy describes. Most tragedies are set in the world of myth, and use gods and other divine figures as major characters in their narrative. Likewise, ancient comedy can easily use a real-world setting, as Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* has shown. Comedy often takes a mundane setting and transforms it into something absurd, while tragedy takes a world from mythology and the distant past, but makes it relevant to the contemporary audience.

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[67] Definition according to the North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA). http://www.nadta.org/what-is-drama-therapy.html. Accessed March, 2014.

[68] Cf. Lifton 1976, 439, in which he outlines the role of play in the psychiatrist's methods of healing veterans.

Chapters Two and Three discussed how *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* can be taken as metaphors for the effects of war trauma and means of dealing with them, but there were naturally other allegories within them that connected their mythical settings to Athenian civic life. Knox, for instance, sees the figure of Odysseus in several Greek tragedies as a stand-in for the ferocious politicians who tried to dominate the Athenian assembly with their rhetoric (Knox 1964, 124). Based on this usage of metaphor, it is possible to surmise that the use of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* was also a metaphor to face war trauma. The results of dramatherapy can attest to the effectiveness of this technique.[69]

Theater of War's Implications for the Athenian theater

It would be prudent at this point to return to the *Theater of War* program, and see how it utilizes the methods of dramatherapy and psychodrama. From a dramatherapy theory standpoint, this program does encourage "individual empowerment and expression", a quality which Schininà attributes to dramatherapy (Schininà 2009, 44). Such instances cannot be denied in the productions of *Theater of War* when, according to Meineck, "The most striking aspect of the event occurred at the end, as one by one the audience members stood up and started to relate their own experiences of war to the plays they had just witnessed" (Meineck 2009, 174). The way that this performance helped facilitate expression for veterans was especially poignant—Meineck made the observation that "One got the distinct impression that much of what was being shared had never been uttered before and certainly not in public" (Meineck 2009, 174). In this regard

[69] See for example, Madan 2010, in which an elementary school established a dramatherapy program in order to aid refugee children in handling their trauma. The children were encouraged to use metaphor and play to express themselves about traumatic experiences while keeping a safe distance from the actual content of the trauma. Some of the metaphors the children used in the program were apparent enough to each other that they did not need unpacking (Madan 2010, 272). The Athenian audience would also have understood the metaphors which applied to them, without needing to unpack them.

the program also shares some of its aspects with psychodrama. It has a clear "sharing" stage in which participants are allowed to express the way that the dramas of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* reflected their own personal experience, just as the audience of a psychodrama would.

If *Theater of War* was helpful for modern war veterans, then it follows that the plays themselves in ancient Athens could also have touched the veterans in the audience on a personal level. They were probably even more effective at that time, since the Greeks had a much closer relationship to the source material. Sophocles himself was elected twice as a general, and every adult male citizen in Athens had performed military training and service (Shay 1995). Thus he was able to effectively use the chorus and the allegories in his plays to send healing messages to an audience of war veterans.

Conclusion

Ajax and *Philoctetes* can be read as plays which emphasize the psychological wounds war causes. In *Ajax*, the titular character went into a dissociative berserk state as a reaction to the trauma of betrayal which was compounded with the stress of war. In *Philoctetes*, the play shows how companionship can enable healing from the isolation and despair that war trauma brings. Both plays thus can be seen as allegories which allowed their audiences to examine their own experiences with trauma and betrayal from a safe distance. The way that the modern readings of these plays affected modern war veterans can attest to the plays' therapeutic and cathartic benefits.

The first chapter set up the historical context of the plays and themes contained within them. It showed that ancient Greek literature--namely passages from Homer, Herodotus, and Gorgias—revealed that war trauma symptoms did exist even at that time, and that they may have been created in part by the brutal, intimate nature which is characteristic of hoplite warfare. Furthermore, it established that the time period in which *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* were produced was particularly turbulent for Athens. Events such as the plague, the disaster of the expedition against Sicily, and the destructions of Melos and Mycalessus could attest to this fact. The careful use of tragedy would allow the Athenians to confront themselves about how the trauma of the Peloponnesian War had affected them.

The second chapter explored how *Ajax* addressed these issues. It showed that the play could be seen as an allegory for the psychologically wounded soldier's inner turmoil. The "madness" which Ajax experienced was similar to the modern state in

soldiers which Shay called the "berserk state." Through this state, Ajax then withdrew himself from the community of the Greek army, and even limited his social horizon to Teucer alone. Finally, unable to handle the combined shame of losing Achilles' armor to Odysseus and inadvertently slaughtering the flocks instead of the men he wished to kill, Ajax found that he would not be able to adapt to a new world in which he must submit to the authority of the *Atreidae*, and committed suicide. These events were all paralleled in the experiences of modern war veterans, which demonstrated that the trauma of war was exemplified in the figure of Ajax.

Chapter Three applied this examination to *Philoctetes*. It showed that Sophocles innovated on the plotline of the myth in order to show the stark isolation which a betrayed soldier feels. His subsequent emotional distress and inability to trust others are then reflected in the interactions that Philoctetes has with Neoptolemus, Odysseus, and the chorus. The play gives the audience hope for the future, however, by showing how Philoctetes' companionship with Neoptolemus and his closure with the dead Heracles allow him to rejoin his community and heal himself. Through this, the veterans of the Peloponnesian War in the audience could be directed to their own reintegration.

Finally, Chapter Four used comparative evidence to suggest how these plays provided therapeutic benefit to their Athenian audience. The purpose of the "sharing" stage of psychodrama is similar to the overall goal of Athenian tragedy of providing catharsis, and the role of the chorus in tragedies correlates to the role of outside members in the protagonist's psychodrama. Dramatherapy also uses techniques which are reflected in Athenian theater: both forms of theater utilize metaphors and safe distancing from the topics they address in order to allow individuals to approach their issues without being re-

traumatized. Finally, the *Theater of War* readings of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* demonstrate the profound effect these plays have on modern war veterans. This would reflect on the plays' corresponding effectiveness on their original audience, who had a closer relationship to their source material.

Although scholars such as Shay, Tritle, and Meagher have thoroughly examined the evidence in ancient Greek literature for war trauma, the field of Roman history and literature has been comparatively neglected. Different methodology may be required in order for trauma studies to be applied to ancient Rome, due to their differences in military organization from the Athenian military. I do, however, recommend an examination into either the presence or lack of trauma symptoms in ancient Rome for the future. Literary works such as Vergil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Civil War* in particular contain themes which I believe lend themselves to this study.[70]

Overall, two essential points of interest arise from this line of argument. First, modern knowledge about war trauma can enhance our understanding of the classics, by helping us to understand the reasons for the themes found in their poetry and plays. Second, this understanding can reflect back onto the modern circle, as *Theater of War* found with their use of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* for the benefit of modern veterans. This is certainly helpful in turn for the field of Classics, as it can generate interest for the cultures of Greece and Rome through the potential which they have to help the modern world.

[70] See Melchior 2011 for one of the few applications of the study of war trauma to the Roman world. While the article should be praised for taking this step forward, the approach is far too conservative: its hesitance due to modern America's ambivalence towards war compared to the Greco-Roman view on war (which it suggests is a more positive outtake on war) is unnecessary. Herodotus' comments on fathers burying sons, and Thucydides' analysis of the *staseis* of the Peloponnesian War are enough to suggest some ambivalence towards war, to say nothing of Lucan's imagery in the *Civil War* centuries later.

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