

Reconsidering Philoctetes' Marginality in Aeschylus' and Euripides' fragmentary plays

In this paper, I explore the dynamics of marginality in the tragic fragments of Aeschylus' and Euripides' *Philoctetes* (*TrGF* F 255a-257 Radt and *TrGF* F 787-803 Kannicht), by examining the interaction among the Achaean army, the Greek embassy to Philoctetes, and Philoctetes himself. I discuss how the desperate need on behalf of the Greeks to besiege the city of Troy made them renounce their previous attitude toward the outcast hero. Building upon this, I study how the aforementioned playwrights, along with Sophocles, handle the reintegration of the disabled man. Are Philoctetes' needs accommodated by the Achaeans on terms favorable to him or not? What do the differences, especially in the ending of those plays, tell us about the treatment of a disabled character?

I frame these questions through the opposition of Self to Other (Ebbott 2005). I argue that the boundary between those two is questioned in these plays. An inversion of the Other in particular occurs: a disabled hero, someone left outside the community since his physical disability destabilized the Self, is now forced to be reintegrated back into the group for the sole reason of serving those who isolated him. Although the Other belongs again to the "insiders" since his contribution is required, he is not fully accepted as he is.

To begin with, Philoctetes' myth (Hom. *Il.* 2.716-725; Soph. *Phil.*) is going to be approached on two levels, namely the dramatic narrative and its psychoanalytical reflection. Philoctetes' marginalization and its effects become evident in Aeschylus' and Euripides' fragmentary plays. Due to the fact, though, that only a handful of fragments from these tragedies survive, I rely on Dio Chrysostom's *Oration* 52, which compares the plays on Philoctetes written by all three Greek tragedians, as well as *Oration* 59, which paraphrases the prologue of

Euripides' play. I also take into account scholarly reconstructions of the plots of these plays (e.g., Calder 1970, Calder 1979, Müller 2000).

TrGF F *250 Radt shows how Philoctetes is situated "in between," as he can neither stay in Lemnos nor sail away. The hero is all by himself without someone to aid him, but that is not the case in Euripides, where Aktor, a Lemnian inhabitant, visits him occasionally. His isolation is even more pronounced in *TrGF* **254 Radt, when he is in delirium and ponders cutting off his own foot. McCoy (2013) comments that Philoctetes suffers less from his wound than from the deep psychological pain caused by his exclusion from the community. Besides that, his solitude made him more rigid, especially toward any Greek, as shown in Euripides' *TrGF* F 789d Kannicht as opposed to Sophocles' hero (*Phil.* 219-231).

The dynamics between the marginalized hero and the army community prompt a discussion about whether Philoctetes' reintegration into the army actually occurs or not. The Achaeans decide to exclude Philoctetes and desert him on Lemnos, as they are disgusted on account of his festering wound ('*φλεγέδαινα*,' *TrGF* F 253 Radt). Philoctetes is no longer harmonized with the rest of the community. He is a disabled male with a terrible sore on his foot that causes him to cry and prevents him from participating in active service. Delving into the narrative's psychoanalytical interpretation, the army community, which depicts the Self, feels aversion toward Philoctetes, who, as the Other, represents abjection. The narrative intriguingly invites us to explore the relationship of Self to Other when, in the myth and by extent in both plays, Philoctetes becomes essential to victory. The community needs to reintegrate the outcast hero since he is the one who holds the key to seizing Troy. Indeed, the Achaeans take Philoctetes back to Troy, but in order to serve their own benefit, not his. As Dio attests (*Or.* 52.2), in both Aeschylus' and Euripides' versions of the story, he was coerced into following the Greek

embassy back to Troy, mostly willingly but to some extent having yielded to persuasion of necessity since he was deprived of his weapons. The wounded hero is reintegrated into the community physically, but he is still identified as a pariah. In other words, the Other is not fully accommodated by the Self and the marginality of the former remains.

Select Bibliography

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