

Echoes of Vocal Impropriety: Persuasive Shouting in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the title character's speech sometimes appears to defy intelligibility, most strikingly on line 746: ἀπαππαπαῖ, παπᾶ παπᾶ παπᾶ παπαῖ. Some have claimed that Sophocles presents Philoctetes as bestial (Worman, 2010; Nussbaum, 2008; Budelman, 2007). Upon further analysis, however, Philoctetes' seemingly inarticulate speech has poetic parallels elsewhere and ought to be examined as a topos.

Tragic diction abounds with various interjections like παπᾶ, αἰαῖ or οἴμοι (Perdiocyanni-Paleologue, 2002), all of which I call "vocables" as a borrowing from linguistic anthropology. Vocables refer to sounds that have no clear definition but that bear semantic value within their own generic or literary context (Hinton, 1980).

In tragedy, suffering female or feminized characters often use vocables to respond to their own plight or to the plight of loved ones (as in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Sophocles' *Electra*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, and many others). Such women face accusations of δυσφημία from men. Male authority figures, therefore, tend to emerge as educators of vocal propriety.

Philoctetes has no greater gender discourse, and yet it has many shouting scenes; moreover, no authority figures chastise Philoctetes' speech. Neoptolemus is too young, and Odysseus is not an educator to Philoctetes. Odysseus, though, does say that Philoctetes' δυσφημία caused his abandonment on line 10 (Gödde 2011 briefly notes this scene on pg. 15).

I argue that Sophocles presents the potential of vocal impropriety to become persuasive in *Philoctetes*. Therefore, we see Philoctetes as succeeding in a type of persuasion that elsewhere in tragedy is impotent and criticized by male characters when female characters use it.

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