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DODONA *VERSUS* DELPHI IN GREEK TRAGEDY:  
THE WANDERINGS OF THE HERO BETWEEN  
EXPIATION AND TIES OF ΓΕΝΟΣ



In 5<sup>th</sup>-century Greek tragedy, the sanctuary of Dodona is closely linked to that of Delphi. They form the two main sources of guidance for the oracular journeys of heroes and they are endowed with very specific characteristics: Dodona is the ancient oracle connected to the *οἶκος* and family ties, whose role is important as regards the end of the hero's journey, his final destination, while Delphi is the oracle of expiation, offering the motive and aim of the wandering, hence playing an essential role at the beginning of oracular travel. Our study will deal with the distinct characteristics of those two oracles in Greek tragedy, focusing, in particular, on the relations developing between them: do they stand in mutual contrast or do they complement each another? What are their respective roles within the heroes' travels?

Consequently, we shall analyze the tragic passages where references to Dodona are found and we will try to comprehend her link to Delphi: in particular, we shall consider *Prometheus Bound*, Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, several fragments from *Odysseus Thorn-Struck*, as well as Euripides' *Andromache* and *Phoenissae*.

The *topos* of "oracular travels", as M. Cavalli notes,<sup>1</sup> is typically tragic

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1. Cavalli (1992). According to this scholar, "oracular travel" is necessary in tragedy in order to explain the presence of a character in a place different from his homeland or his absence from the stage. To the first of these two types of oracular travels it is possible, for example, to attribute (among the travels that involve the oracle of Dodona,

and is included, according to A. Brelich's study,<sup>2</sup> within the wider category of the "travels of the hero", which have diverse mythical justifications and serve various purposes: exile travels, travels for colonization and foundation of cities, travels that give rise to certain features of the landscape (such as springs, harbours or temples), solitary and adventurous migrations, sometimes connected with a distorted state of *μανία*, or "heroic migrations" intended to accomplish praiseworthy exploits and to achieve everlasting kleos (for instance, the labours of Heracles). But, in any case, all these subgroups of "travels of the hero" share some constant, essential aspects: the travels pertain to the mythical status of the hero and are probably justified by the need to explain why a hero was honoured in several different places in the Greek world, while often (and this is what interests us) they are carried out at the instigation of oracles. The hero may migrate at the order of an oracle enjoining him to found a city or, more generally, leading him to the realization and complete fulfilment of his own heroic status. As A. Camerotto remarks, heroes are heroes because they perform *ἔργα*, i.e. memorable acts: struggles against monsters, fights and duels with enemies, but also long journeys through the unknown, towards inaccessible places, during which they face terrible dangers<sup>3</sup>.

This form of "heroic and oracular travel", essentially mythical and tragic, is also perfectly applicable to the Dodona sanctuary, which is always connected, in tragedy, with the wanderings of a character through various and often remote lands: when Dodona is mentioned (as a locus of sacredness), travel is always mentioned, as well, in the form of wanderings and escapes. In this particular case, Dodona comes at the end, bringing the wanderings of the hero to a *τέλος* by means of an oracle or a simple offer of protection, Zeus Dodonaios ensures a safe return home, the recovery of the *οἶκος*, the preservation or rebuilding of family bonds and ties of *γένος*, which — during the, often impossible, vicissitudes undergone by the character — are endangered and often appear on the verge of being broken.

But, on the other hand, when we encounter in tragedy the oracle of Dodona, we can be sure that, somewhere, in a more or less explicit way,

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which will be dealt with in this article) the wanderings of Io in *Prometheus Bound* and to the second, instead, that of Orestes in Euripides' *Andromache*, that of Neoptolemus, also in the *Andromache*, and that of Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

2. Brelich (1958) 71-2, 138-40, 282, 298-301, 316, 349-50.

3. See Camerotto (2006-2007) 257.

there is also that of Delphi to be found:<sup>4</sup> as M. Cavalli remarks, in the few cases in which another oracle is present, it does not replace that of Delphic Apollo, but is simply put side by side, signalling a later phase of the action.<sup>5</sup> Yet, it can be immediately sensed that the oracle of Apollo is connected with a totally different idea: if the sanctuary of Dodona comes at the (at least ideal) ‘end’ of the hero’s travel, Delphic Apollo comes at its beginning; he demands the journey as a form of sacred tribute, of expiation, of purification from the *μίασμα*, as the redemption from a stain. All in all, Delphi emerges as a more ‘tragic’ oracle, we might say, compared to that of Zeus Dodonaios, which is more ‘epically’ connected with the Homeric principles of family, heritage, attachment to one’s offspring and the roots of *γένος*.

It is also important to note how the technical problem of staging the mythical *topos* of the hero’s oracular travel<sup>6</sup> is solved: it is usually kept offstage, suggesting, through the power of words, some broader space.<sup>7</sup> This is the preferred way in which sacredness, in its oracular-prophetic form, is presented in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Greek tragedy: Delphi and Dodona interact with each other and, in those cases, they speak to the audience from offstage,

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4. Plato, too, mentions Dodona twice in connection with Delphi: cf. *Phaedrus* 244 b2-4 (ἢ τε γὰρ δὴ ἐν Δελφοῖς προφητὶς αἶ τε ἐν Δωδώνῃ ἱερεῖαι μανεῖσαι μὲν πολλὰ δὴ καὶ καλὰ ἰδία τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἠργάσαντο) and *Laws* b8-c3 (οὐδὲς ἐπιχειρήσει κινεῖν νοῦν ἔχων ὅσα ἐκ Δελφῶν ἢ Δωδώνης παρ’ Ἄμμωνος ἢ τινες ἔπεισαν παλαιοὶ λόγοι ὀπηδή τινας πείσαντες, φασμάτων γενομένων ἢ ἐπιπνοίας λεχθείσης θεῶν); the only other mention of Dodona in the Platonic corpus is also in the *Phaedrus* and stresses the antiquity of the oracle (275 b5-6): οἱ δὲ γ’, ὦ φίλε, ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Δωδωναίου ἱερῷ δρῦος λόγους ἔφησαν μαντικούς πρότους γενέσθαι.

5. Cavalli (1992) 49.

6. We should point out that, whilst we always talk about mythical *topoi*, in fact, the boundary between reality and mythical imagination is not so well-defined. It is, in fact, a theme closely connected with the spirituality and ritual practice of the Greek people; thus, the inextricable link between myth and ritual comes into play, a link which marks a solid line of continuity between the historical and the mythological-literary level. For instance, Parke recalls an episode narrated by the historian Ephoros (*FGrHist* 70 F 119 = Strab. 9,2,4), which involves Boeotians from Thessaly and Pelasgians, two (antagonistic) populations that had to consult the oracle of Dodona because of a common concern, the question of belonging to a land; see Parke (1967) 71. This furnishes proof of the fact that the motif of the hero’s “oracular travel” (in this case a real *νόστος*) and the connection of Dodona’s oracle, in tragedy, with the theme of returning home and the sense of belonging to a fatherland or a *γένος*, were not merely mythical-literary *topoi*, but, in a certain sense, historical-religious givens, possibly attributable to real sacred connotations of the Epirotic oracle of Zeus, that had exerted their own influence on its literary and mythical image.

7. See Di Benedetto-Medda (1997) 34-5.

from an “elsewhere”. From there, however, they play an active part in the dynamics of the plot: they direct, from the outside, the decisions and movements of the characters and often act a role of protagonists (or, in a sense, of *regisseurs*) within the plan of Destiny, which hangs over the mythical events taking place onstage.

Hence, the oracular reality of Dodona, in tragedy, ‘goes further’: it is situated on a wider horizon, it crosses the narrow technical limits of the dramatic unity of time and space. Most often it is not a reality physically represented, actually visible to the audience’s eyes, but it is almost invariably an evoked reality — narrated, made vivid and present through the sacred power of the word. It is perceptible only through that inner sight, which gives shape to the imagination, and also through individual faith and spirituality.

Let us proceed, then, to explore those offstage places of sacredness, by considering the main instances in which the sanctuary of Dodona is cited, as an oracle, in surviving Greek tragedy;<sup>8</sup> yet, we shall not merely concentrate on the sacred connotations of the oracle of Dodona itself, but also on its relationship with Delphi.

### 1) *From Delphi to Dodona: a harmonious oracular complementarity*

#### 1. The wanderings of Io (*Prometheus Bound* 658-72; 829-38)

We begin with a difficult play, *Prometheus Bound*, notoriously problematic as far as its authorship and date is concerned,<sup>9</sup> yet indispensable for our

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8. In this paper, we do not take into consideration the possible mention of Dodona in Sophocles’ *Euryalos*, due to its uncertain status (see here Marotta 2001-2002, with a short account of the *Euryalos* on page 133); neither shall we deal here on the Euripidean fragments of the *Erechtheus* and the *Melanippe Desmotis*, in which the mention of Dodona is too isolated to afford a safe reconstruction of its dramatic role (see Parke 1967, 72-3 and 80).

9. Some scholars assume that the play is definitely Aeschylean, dating it at about 470 B.C., after Aeschylus’ stay in Sicily (since the reference to Typhon and Aetna’s eruption seems to be linked to Pindar’s 1st *Pythian*, dated precisely in 470 B.C.). According to other scholars, the play must, instead, be attributed to the last years of Aeschylus’ life: he died in the city of Gela, in 456 B.C., hence they believe that he composed the *Prometheus* for a Sicilian public, shortly after the fall of Thrasylbulus’ tyranny. But most modern scholars, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, have questioned the attribution of this tragedy to Aeschylus, on the basis of certain aspects of style and content, absent from the other extant Aeschylean plays but

study, since it involves a remarkable mention of the Epirotic sanctuary of Dodona: it is the place where the wanderings of Io begin<sup>10</sup> (Clearchus, quoted by Athaeneus, speaks, in a proverbial tone, about *Ἰοῦς δρομους*<sup>11</sup>). Indeed, in the myth of Io — as it is presented in *Prometheus Bound* — we come across the oracle of Dodona (and later that of Delphi, too), in connection with “the oracular travels of the hero”. In particular, in the record of cases proffered by A. Brelich, the travels of Io may be included among the “foundation” migrations, linked to the madness of the heroine.<sup>12</sup>

Io, the girl with the heifer’s horns, in her tormented escape, wandering from land to land and stung by the gadfly sent by jealous Hera, arrives on the stage, which represents the Caucasus (thus the offstage space of the journey fits into the present and the concrete sphere of dramatic performance). There, Prometheus is chained to the rock, and in him Io finds some-

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present, for instance, in Sophocles and Euripides (the existence of sophistic elements, in particular). According to this hypothesis, the play might have been composed at, approximately, the 440s/430s B.C. and the *terminus ante quem* might have been Aristophanes’ *Knights* of 424 (verse 836 alludes to verse 613 of *Prometheus Vincetus*) and also Cratinus’ *Plutoi* of 429 (because the gods of wealth introduce themselves as “Titans”). For a summary of what has been published so far on this issue, see Griffith (1983) 31-5; Pattoni (1987) 15 ff.; Rogers (2005) 198-203; Susanetti (2010) 47-9. See also MacRae (1909); Saïd (1985), Zuntz (1993) and, for an earlier dating: Seymour (1879); Yorke (1936); Davidson (1949); Herington (1964).

10. See Marotta (2001-2002) 127. Another great tragedy, fully extant and certainly Aeschylean, which displays an interest in the sanctuary of Dodona, is the *Suppliants*: indeed, in line 258, Pelasgos, King of the Argives, explains to the girls of the Chorus that he is the sovereign of a vast kingdom, which reaches to the extreme borders of the sea, to the lands of Pindus, *ἄρη τε Δωδωναία*. We shall not deal further with this reference, since the mountains of Dodona are not mentioned there with an explicit reference to the sanctuary and the oracular and sacred role of the place, but only as a geographic-political boundary: we must note, however, how Dodona represents here the “limit of the known”, as if it were the bulwark of a great kingdom that springs up under its holy sign; an extreme, border zone of the Greek world, but one which contains and protects — we may say — all the lands which constitute “the inside”, the “homeland”, that great friendly empire which shall grant hospitality to the fugitive girls, and in which they will finally find their home and protection.

11. Athen. 14.619C = Clearchus fr. 32 Wehrli.

12. See Brelich (1958) 282. The examples cited in that essay are those of Alos and Alcmaeon, but our instance from tragedy may with right be included in this category: in fact, the prophecy addressed by Prometheus to Io finishes with the future foundation of a colony, at the end of her mad wanderings (the language of madness is recurrent): *οὕτως σ’ ὁδώσει τὴν τρίγωνον ἐς χθόνα / Νειλῶτιν, οὐδὲ τὴν μακρὰν ἀποικίαν, / Ἰοῖ, πέπρωται σοί τε καὶ τέκνοις κτίσαι* (813-5).

one to confide in, someone to whom she can tell her story and with whom she can share her worries: she tells him how, when still a *παρθένος*, she was visited in her rooms by almighty Zeus, night after night, experiencing anxious dreams that urged her to welcome a divine wedding. When she dared to reveal her dreams to her father, he, as a first response, resolved at once to send a large number of messengers to consult the oracles at Dodona and Delphi: *ὁ δ' ἔξ τε Πυθῶ καπὶ Δωδώνῃν πυκνὸς / θεοπρόπους ἵαλλεν, ὡς μάθοι τί χροῆ / δρῶντ' ἢ λέγοντα δαίμοσιν πράσσειν φίλα* (658-60). But neither of them, initially at least, provided him with intelligible answers.

Finally, the voice of Apollo from Delphi responded clearly: the author of *Prometheus* takes care to point out that the prophecy is the “work of Loxias”; indeed, he speaks of *Λοξίου μαντεύμασιν* (669) and this expression clearly implies that the oracle stems from the Pythic Apollo, not Dodona.<sup>13</sup> The Pythic oracle ordered her father to throw Io out of the *οἶκος* without delay, to send her away, albeit reluctantly, to travel the world, a world she did not know, lacking any indications of a path to follow. It is in this way that the travels of Io begin.

At this point, let us take into consideration the remarkable manner in which the oracle of Dodona comes into play. For L. G. Mitchell,

Dodona plays the leading part over Delphi (despite the fact that in *Prometheus* it is said that Io is driven from home because of the oracles of Loxias: 669-71). Dodona is Io's first port of call after she sets out on her wanderings and it is Dodona which significantly foretells that Io will become the bride of Zeus (*Prom.* 829-35).<sup>14</sup>

But perhaps, rather than assuming a “leading role” of one sanctuary over the other, it would be more appropriate to posit a factual distinction in their respective roles: there is no need to perceive Dodona as “superior” in comparison with Delphi, but rather as appointed to a task that is just as “other” as it is complementary compared to the Apollinian oracle, with which she cooperates on an equal footing in order to realise a common, grand and sacred project.

Now, let us take up the threads of the tragedy: Prometheus (who knows everything about Io, more than she herself does) takes up her story from the point where it has developed till then and reminds her that the first stop on

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13. Parke (1967) 51.

14. Mitchell (2001) 341.

her anxious journey has precisely been the mountain of Dodona (*αἰπύνωτον Δωδώνην*, 830). There, the sacred oak of Zeus at last spoke clear words to her (*λαμπρῶς κοῦδὲν αἰνικτηρίως*, 833) about her destiny and the end of her mad wanderings: she was told that, in the end, after many vicissitudes, exhausting but necessary, she would become the wife of Zeus (*ἢ Διὸς κλεινὴ δάμαρ*, 834); from this wedding, from the “touch” of Zeus, a son would be born, Epaphus, and from him a long dynasty would be generated. Hence, we may assert that Io shall find her roots; at the end of this relentless wandering, she will finally find a home, a family, a *γένος*, a stable status.

Thus, one usually encounters Dodona — from a mythical and theatrical point of view — at the start of a journey into the unknown, but one does not depart from it until having received the promise of a reassuring arrival home, of putting down roots and remaining where one belongs genetically and ethnically: as Moscati Castelnovo notes, everything beyond Dodona belongs to an “other” world. Epirus is a border region, a sort of “gateway”, but, at the same time, it is an eminent point of reference for the Hellenic people as far as the formation of their identity is concerned, hosting the most ancient oracular sanctuary in the Greek world.<sup>15</sup>

But let us move now to Sophocles, where one too comes across similar themes, both in the *Trachiniae*, as well as in the meagre fragments surviving from *Odysseus Thorn-Struck*.

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15. See Moscati Castelnovo (2005) 142-3. This scholar studies the Herodotean tale (Herod. 4.33-5) of the long journey (and the long “relay race”) of the Hyperborean gifts, periodically sent as offerings to Delos, and attempts to define the role of the sanctuary of Dodona in this fabulous, ritual journey; she notes, first of all, that it consists of two parts: “una sezione appartenente alla geografia dell’immaginario ed una, con inizio a Dodona, che corrisponde ad un percorso effettivo” (p. 142). Therefore, Dodona, once again, represents the concrete and physical beginning of a sacred journey but also already a sort of “arrival home”, the achievement of the aim; it is the threshold beyond which one enters the “Greek world”, the known and familiar world, the reassuring coordinates of a “domestic” space, a native area, pertaining to one’s identity (*πρώτους Δωδωναίους Ἑλλήνων δέκεσθαι*). Hence, Dodona acquires a strongly Greek character, which may account for the role of “oracle of the *οἶκος*”, that seems to hold in the *Prometheus*, and, in general, in extant 5th-century tragedies. In fact, in his *Meteorologica*, Aristotle talks about a location “in the heart itself of the original Greece”: *περὶ τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν ἐγένετο τόπον μάλιστα, καὶ τούτου περὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὴν ἀρχαίαν. Αὕτη δ’ ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ Δωδώνην καὶ τὸν Ἀγελῶν*. (Arist. *Meteor.* 1.14. 352a33-5). From here we can infer that “in the fifth and fourth centuries, at least, the Greeks liked to think of Dodona as their spiritual, and sometimes actual, homeland” (Mitchell 2001, 342).

*Sophocles*2. The wanderings of Heracles (*Trachiniae* 164-72; 1164-73)

Heracles is not onstage at the beginning of the tragedy: he has left for one of his many travels, in order to perform one of the many labours that the oracle of Delphi has prescribed as expiation for the *μίσμα* of which he was guilty in the past: namely the destruction of all his family, his first wife Megara and all his children, deeds perpetrated in a raptus of madness, caused by Hera's jealousy. From the point of view of its classification as "travels of the hero", Heracles' tragic journey may be included within the generic category of migrations having as their aim the performance of great deeds worthy of *κλέος*, deeds which determine the very status of the hero.<sup>16</sup> In this case, however, the journey of the hero — an oracular journey commanded by Delphic Apollo — is marked by the specific aim of purification from the *μίσμα* of crime, and particularly the type of crime defined as "involuntary killing".<sup>17</sup> In any case, we realize at once that Delphi is present at the very beginning of Heracles' travels (while he is absent from the stage): even though in the *Trachiniae* (exceptionally) this oracle is never explicitly named and only Dodona is mentioned,<sup>18</sup> nevertheless, Delphi is really there too, hidden during the previous part of the dramatic action, which, moreover, each member of the audience is well acquainted with.

But what role does Dodona play in all those events? We have seen that Heracles is absent from the initial scenes: yet, he is well present in the minds and hearts of his kin, the characters on stage, i.e. his wife Deianira and his son Hyllus, who are distraught because of the delay in his return; in fact, Deianira remembers a prophecy received by her husband at Dodona (which Heracles will repeat later, on his return, with some variations): Zeus, who is the inhabitant of the sacred Oak, has offered, through the

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16. See Brelich (1958) 300.

17. See Brelich (1958) 72, who quotes as examples the case of Patroklos in the *Iliad* or that of Tlepolemos in Apollodorus' version.

18. See Parke (1967) 60-1 ("this is the first Greek tragedy in which the oracle of Dodona in this way is made to play a central role. [...] Here no other oracle except Dodona is named"), and Cavalli (1992) 49: according to her thesis, if in 5th-century Greek tragedy there is an oracular source, it is always and regularly Delphi; even when other oracles are named, they never replace that of Pythic Apollo, but stand beside it in second place; there is a sole exception, namely the *Trachiniae*.

voice of the leaves, ambiguous predictions about the end of the hero's wanderings:

τότ' ἢ θανεῖν χρεΐη σφε τῶδε τῶ χρόνῳ.  
 ἢ τοῦθ' ἐπεκδραμόντα τοῦ χρόνου τέλος  
 τὸ λοιπὸν ἦδη ζῆν ἀλυπήτῳ βίῳ.  
 .....  
 ὡς τὴν παλαιὰν φηγὸν ἀδῆσαι ποτε  
 Δωδῶνι δισσῶν ἐκ πελειάδων ἔφη. (166-72).

Heracles, having appeared onstage, and by now at the end of his life, seems instead to bear witness to an oracle unambiguous in its essence, yet of which a double interpretation is provided, an interpretation which actually coincides with the two options indicated by the oracle as related by Deianira. Heracles now realizes its ultimate meaning:

ἦ μοι χρόνῳ τῶ ζῶντι καὶ παρόντι νῦν  
 ἔφασκε μόχθων τῶν ἐφεστῶτων ἐμοὶ  
 λύσιν τελεῖσθαι· κἀδόκονν πράξειν καλῶς.  
 τὸ δ' ἦν ἄρ' οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν θανεῖν ἐμέ·  
 τοῖς γὰρ θανοῦσι μόχθος οὐ προσγίγνεται (1169-73).

Thus, in spite of the ambiguity of his prophecy, what Zeus promises to the hero is an end to his journey, the fulfilment of all of his wanderings; and this τέλος (eventually effected on stage, in the second part of the drama) coincides with the recovery of the heritage of family ties. The thought of the oracle reinforces in Deianira the strength of her affection and of her nostalgia for her husband, while it effectively causes her reunion with him, even though she is tragically condemned to be the unintentional author of his inevitable demise. Moreover, the oracle of Dodona also causes Hyllus to become more attached to Heracles, reinforcing the urgent desire to be close to him; indeed, after his return, even though immediately carried off by the inescapable destiny of death, the father-son relationship becomes even tighter, certainly in a tragic way, expressed through the bond of eternal faithfulness: Heracles implores Hyllus to “stay close to his father” (*καὶ νῦν προσελθὼν στῆθι πλῆσιον πατρός*, 1076) and to promise him to “really appear his son” (*ᾧ παῖ, γενοῦ μοι παῖς ἐτήτυμος γεγώς*, 1064). In all of his speech, the same ideas and names of “father” and “son” are being obsessively repeat-

ed;<sup>19</sup> finally, it is the dramatic situation itself of a son without a father, that appears in his thoughts (*ἴθ', ὦ τέκνον· πατήρ γὰρ οὐκέτ' ἔστι σοι*, 1146). He also expresses to Hyllus the need he feels to reunite all of his family around him, his whole “lineage”, i.e. his other sons and his mother Alcmena; in such a reunion he finds the sense of his own origins (*κάλει τὸ πᾶν μοι σπέρμα σῶν ὀμαιμόνων, / κάλει δὲ τὴν τάλαιναν Ἀλκμήνην*, 1147-8); finally, Heracles also speaks about his father and reveals to his son the prophecies received by him in the past (1159 ff.). In short, the hero seems motivated by a primordial instinct of self-preservation — through his belonging to a *γένος* — by an inner need to immortalize himself in the continuity of his progeny; it is for this reason that he requires Hyllus to get married to Iole, as a seal and guarantee of this continuity. Indeed, that tendency of the soul, deeply human, which impels someone to become strongly attached to what is part of him and of his “generation”, emerges under the sign of Zeus Dodonaios, the god who presides over it and gives rise to it.

But, above all, what will soon happen after his death, well-known to the audience, is the apotheosis of Heracles and his assumption into heaven: his rejoining his real family, the divine one, and his return to the side of his father, Zeus. Moreover, Hyllus’ words open the door to the future, suggesting a different ending: *τὰ μὲν οὖν μέλλοντ' οὐδεις ἐφορᾷ* (1270). Thus, Heracles dies, but the role of the oracles is accomplished: Delphi (offstage) has caused the separation from the *οἶκος* and the purificatory travels of the hero; Dodona has assured the ultimate conclusion of his wanderings, the “homecoming” (in the broadest sense of the word) and, with it, the recovery of Heracles’ belonging to his own *γένος*, to his own generational basis.

But behind all this, there is a mystery — for us, not for a 5<sup>th</sup>-century audience, who knew the background to the play and was invited to reflect on that: departing from the tradition, Sophocles substitutes Dodona for Delphi, particularly through the prophecy of the *τέλος* of the hero’s wanderings and labours. According to a “cultural encyclopædia” commonly shared, the Pythic oracle did not merely dispatch Heracles on his travels,

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19. *Παῖς* (1024, 1031, 1064, 1253); *τέκνον* (1070, 1146, 1174, 1221); *πατήρ* (1076, 1137, 1146, 1178, 1204, 1224); *πατρῷος* (1223); the same sense of “father” is alternatively expressed by the root that defines him as “giver of life” (*τὸν φύτορ* [α], 1032; *τοῦ φυτεύσαντος*, 1244), while the sense of “son” is additionally conveyed through a simple possessive genitive (*εἶπερ εἶ τοῦδ' ἀνδρός*, 1200-1) or through the possessive pronoun (*ἐμός*, 1158 and 1205), stressing, thus, the “anxious” archaic principle according to which the son belongs to the father.

but had also acted, in a sense, as the guarantor of their end. As Parke notes, Diodorus Siculus and Apollodorus both knew two versions of a Delphic oracle, according to which Heracles would achieve immortality either after twelve labours or after twelve years and ten labours; he believes that Sophocles knew this latter version or a similar one, as it may be sensed from lines 821 ff., where the Chorus of *Trachiniae* speaks of a “twelve-year prophecy”:<sup>20</sup> this prophecy is never mentioned elsewhere in the play and the number twelve indeed seems to be an allusion to the Delphic oracle mentioned by the other sources. Yet, why does Sophocles make this substitution? Why he should choose Dodona rather than Delphi, if he really does so, is less easy to guess, according to Parke, who attempts to explain the substitution on dramatic grounds:

The Heracles of the play is curiously inhuman and savage, as commentators have remarked. Hence it may have been more appropriate that the mainsprings of his action should not come from Delphi, familiar to many of the Athenian audience, but rather from Dodona, strange and outlandish as it probably seemed. Certainly Sophocles takes occasion somewhat to stress this aspect in his allusions.<sup>21</sup>

I do not believe, however, that Dodona was experienced as “strange and outlandish” by the Athenian public; the contrary appears, rather, to be true: if Delphic Apollo is the god who strictly requires purification from the *μίασμα*, and, therefore, takes men and women away from their reassuring family context, throwing them into a foreign and alienating world, Zeus Dodonaios, instead, restores them to daily life, to their family and to their own origins. Now, if this is true, it may prove a useful sign for unveiling the mystery of Sophocles’ deviation from the common tradition. In Apollodorus, for instance, the traditional version of the prophecy stresses the idea of the hero’s immortality, reached through hard and dangerous trials after the purification of his heroic nature:

*Πυθία [...] κατοικεῖν [...] αὐτὸν εἶπεν ἐν Τίρυνθι, Εὐρυσθεὶ λατρεύοντα ἕτη δώδεκα, καὶ τοὺς ἐπιτασσομένους ἄθλους δέκα ἐπιτελεῖν, καὶ οὕτως ἔφη, τῶν ἄθλων συντελεσθέντων, ἀθάνατον αὐτὸν ἕσεσθαι.*<sup>22</sup>

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20. Parke (1967) 61.

21. Parke (1967) 62.

22. [Apollod.] *Biblioth.* 2.4.12.

Only after this long series of exploits, required by the god, can Heracles achieve the fulfilment of his semi-divine nature, up to the final apotheosis: this is a process over which only Apollo may preside, with his austere sacrality. But Sophocles had, possibly, a further aim: he may have wanted to stress not merely the purification of the hero, but also his return home; hence, the assumption into heaven is also to be interpreted as the hero's restoration to a *γένος*, to his real divine family, to his ultimate genealogical origins: it is, probably, for this reason that Sophocles needed Dodona as well — and not solely Delphi.

On the other hand, Dodona was a very ancient sacred place, of primordial quality, and this is how it was conceived of by the Greeks: it was indeed thought to be the oldest of Greek sanctuaries.<sup>23</sup> There was no enclosed place for cult, but prophecies were given in the open air, through the rustling of the oak's leaves, while priests slept on the ground and walked barefoot, in order to maintain the original contact with the earth, as Sophocles himself wishes to stress in the same tragedy: *τῶν ὄρειων καὶ χαμαικοιτῶν [...]* *Σελλῶν [...]* *ἄλσος [...]* *πρὸς τῆς πατρώας καὶ πολυγλώσσου δρυός* (1166-8). It is worth citing here Easterling's comment:

these priests of Zeus at Dodona were noted for sleeping on the ground and refraining from washing their feet, thereby no doubt preserving their connections with chthonic powers. Cf. *Il.* 16.234-35 *ἀμφὶ δὲ Σελλοὶ / σοὶ ναίονσ' ὑποφῆται ἀνιπτόποδες, χαμαιεῦναι*. Perhaps Sophocles deliberately uses *ὄρειων* as a vaguer and more dignified term than *ἀνιπτόποδες*.<sup>24</sup>

The evident Iliadic reprise reveals the poet's aim to return to the Homeric tradition and the archaic epic perception of the sacred place of Dodona (even more clearly present in *Odysseus Thorn-struck*, as we shall see). Moreover, it seems that the ritual status of the sanctuary is perfectly coherent with a sense of solid bond with the roots, with the "ground", which, for Greeks, meant whatever predates the complications of civilization: family, birth, the stability of one's own existence, always closely connected with links of familial affection.

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23. Mitchell (2001) 341.

24. Easterling (1982) 219.

3. The wanderings of Odysseus (*Odysseus Thorn-Struck*, Fr. 453-61 Radt)

We are faced with a similar situation in *Odysseus Thorn-Struck* (Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀκανθοπλήξ), a Sophoclean tragedy preserved in a very fragmentary state.<sup>25</sup> Still, four of the eight fragments appearing in the corpus of Radt<sup>26</sup> mention the oracle of Dodona and one of them also the Pythic oracle:

F 455: Δωδῶνι ναίων Ζεὺς ὁμί[ ]ος βροτῶν

F 456: τὰς θεσπιωδὸς ἱερέας Δωδωνίδα

F 460: νῦν δ' οὔτε μ' ἐκ Δωδωνος οὔτε Πυθικῶν  
γυ[άλων] τις ἂν πείσειεν

F 461: καὶ τὸν ἐν Δωδῶνι παῦσον δαίμον' ἐδλογούμενον

According to G. Paduano's reconstruction, this tragedy staged the death of Odysseus, killed by Telegonus (Odysseus' and Circe's son): it was the topic of the Cyclic Poem entitled *Telegony*, attributed to Eugammon of Cyrene. Telegonus went to Ithaca, looking for his father, but, there, a struggle with the shepherds broke out: then, Telegonus' spear, with its deathly thorn, killed Odysseus. The latter had just returned from Thesprotia, where he had celebrated the sacrifice to Poseidon prescribed by Teiresias in Homer's *Nekyia*, namely in a place far from the sea, where he would encounter people who did not know the oar; yet, this would also be a sign of the end of his life. Besides, an oracle of Dodona had warned him: he would be killed by his son. In fact, this oracle is named several times in the existing fragments.<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, in tragedy, Teiresias "is" Apollo: as M. Cavalli observes, every prophetic intervention in tragedy stems from Delphic Apollo and his prophets, such as Teiresias;<sup>28</sup> on the other hand, in the few remaining fragments of this tragedy, the "cave of Pytho" is mentioned as being located near the prophetic sanctuary of Dodona. Hence, if we accept the

25. See Aristotle, *Poetics* 14.1453b29-34, where this Sophoclean tragedy is quoted together with the Sophoclean *Oedipus Rex* and Astydamas' *Alcmaeon*, as an example of tragic action whereby ἀγνοοῦντας [...] πρᾶξαι τὸ δεινόν (30), but after that kinship is realized: ὕστερον ἀναγνωρίσαι τὴν φιλίαν. It is, thus, a drama of φιλία, which brings onstage links of affections and family relationships, themes bearing the connotations that our sanctuary assumes in tragedy.

26. Radt (1977).

27. See Paduano (1982) 951-3.

28. See Cavalli (1992) 49.

identification of Teiresias (as spokesman of the god) with the Delphic oracle, we again discern the same ritual scheme: there is a hero (Odysseus) who begins a journey under the sign of Delphic Apollo, who demands from him a separation from his homeland (Ithaca), with a sacred aim, namely to extinguish his human “debts” to the gods. After that, the hero will return to his homeland, with the prophecy of this *τέλος* being provided again by the oracle of Dodona, which adds a sad prediction concerning his *γένος*: his son will be the cause of his death, as Herakles’ wife was the cause of that hero’s death, acting as the unsuspecting executor of an inescapable destiny. Nonetheless, the hero returns home at the end of his wanderings and after his death the *οἶκος* is complete, because Telegonus marries Penelope and Telemachus marries Circe, as, in a similar way, Hyllus marries Iole. Over this conclusion presides the prophetic voice of the Oak of Dodona, consulted before departure, which accompanies the travels of the hero, directing him to his final destiny.

Furthermore, it is equally clear that, in this tragedy, Sophocles provides us with a deeply and intentionally Homeric Dodona, linked to the epic tradition, according to which Odysseus went there in order to find out how to return home: secretly or openly.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, the mere mention of the oracle of Dodona would probably bear significance for every member of the audience, immediately evoking Homeric memories, which belonged to a collective imagination shared by everyone: hence, as Parke remarks, it is by no means strange that the poet has chosen Dodona, since “after the references to Dodona in the *Odyssey* it was the obvious oracle-centre to choose”.<sup>30</sup> Homer must, therefore, be the reason why this oracle holds a prominent position within *Odysseus Thorn-Struck*.

The Homeric background may help us to explain why, as is the case in other tragedies, the oracle of Dodona takes on this special quality of “oracle of the *οἶκος*”: Zeus Dodonaios is always the god who foretells the end of the wanderings and the restitution of the family, of the security of a *γένος*; Dodona appears as the oracle of “home” and of family ties surviving the alienation of a life of wandering. It is the place where, thanks to the intrusion of the god in his life, a man can recover the foundations of his existence. Zeus Dodonaios is always present, following the pilgrim in his journey, with the prophetic hope of ending the exile, of obtaining a *τέλος*, a fulfil-

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29. See Marotta (2001-2002) 133.

30. Parke (1967) 64.

ment (of the travels, as well as of his very identity): he protects him until he finds his *οἶκος* again, his heritage of affections. Thus, in the Homeric poems too, the oracle of Dodona is the oracle of Zeus *ἐρκεῖος*, protector of the home, numen-founder of the family identity and of the *γένος*, in the sense of a primordial search for one's roots. In the archaic period, during the instauration of the Olympic cult over the pre-Hellenic one, which originally occupied the area of the sanctuary,

Zeus [...] became an inhabitant of Dodona, with the epithet *Ναῖος*, meaning dweller, from the verb *ναίω* = inhabit, and the Prehellenic goddess took the name of Dione [...], in accordance with the patriarchal tradition of the ancient Greeks.<sup>31</sup>

A god “who inhabits”, therefore, builds his home at Dodona: a divine couple permanently dwelling by the sacred Oak, two consorts whose *modus vivendi* reflects that of an actual archaic Greek family. Hence, there exists, in Dodona, a real sacred *οἶκος*, inspiring to everyone a feeling of spiritual domicile and embodying a familiar point of reference, recognizable in daily human life. All this fits in perfectly with the Homeric tradition.

It is in this spirit, in fact, that Achilles invokes Zeus Dodonaios in his famous Iliadic prayer (16.233-48), which opens with the following words: *Ζεῦ ἄνα Δωδωναῖε, Πελασγικέ, τηλόθι ναίων, / Δωδώνης μεδέων δυσχειμέρον· ἀμφὶ δὲ Σελλοὶ / σοὶ ναίονσ' ὑποφῆται ἀνιπτόποδες χαμαιεῦναι* (233-5). He entreats Zeus to allow his dearest friend Patroclus to return from war — Patroclus without whom his *οἶκος* would have been severed, his tent would lose its lively familiar warmth, whilst the affective unity and human ties, which also guarantee the safety of a hero, would equally go missing. In this same sense, in the *Odyssey* as well, Odysseus goes to Dodona in order to consult the oracle: the hero wishes to know how he will be able to return home, to join his son, his wife and the rest of his family: *τὸν δ' ἐς Δωδώνην φάτο βήμεναι, ὄφρα θεοῖο / ἐκ δρυὸς ὑψικόμοιο Διὸς βουλὴν ἐπακούσαι, / ὄσπῳ νοστήσει' Ἰθάκης ἐς πῖονα δῆμον, / ἤδη δὴν ἀπεών, ἧ ἀμφιδὸν ἦε κρυφῆδόν* (14.327-330).<sup>32</sup>

Finally, I believe that it is in the same spirit that the oracle of Zeus Dodonaios appears anew in 5<sup>th</sup>-century tragedy; *Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀκανθοπλήξ* might, actually, offer the clearest example, a sort of “literary program” as far as the

31. Dakaris (1998) 8.

32. The same verses are repeated in *Od.* 19.296-9, with one sole change: *φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν* (298), in place of *Ἰθάκης ἐς πῖονα δῆμον* (14.299).

sacred role of Dodona in Greek tragedy — the “sense” of the oracles, more generally — is concerned.

Observations (I): But what is then “the sense of the oracles”, in *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles?

In all examples that we have considered, Dodona provides, first of all, the vagabond with the prophecy of a future end to his wanderings, an end that will coincide with the rebuilding of the *οἶκος*: it is with this hope in his heart, strengthened by this guarantee about the future, that the tragic hero faces the dangers and labours of the journey. Dodona is, therefore, placed at the (almost ideal) end of the hero’s travels: but, on closer examination, we see that it is also placed at the start, because, in practical terms, the oracular consultation takes place beforehand, as a ritually unavoidable act, we might say: if a man seeks hope for the future, he must start from Dodona, trusting in the “god of roots” and beginning his wanderings under the sign of the protector of family, in order that his journey of separation from the *οἶκος* does not result in the “eradication” of family ties, as well.

How does then Delphi fit into this mechanism? In all the cases considered, the oracle of Delphi appears to be in harmony with Dodona and complementary to it: Delphic Apollo is the dispatcher, placed at the beginning of the vicissitudes and causing the wanderings of the hero. Indeed, Apollo is always “the god who sends”, considering his role in Greek colonization: colonial enterprises and colonists almost always have the blessing of Delphic Apollo. This is, more generally, the role of Apollo: already in the *Homeric Hymns*, he is the god who takes humans by surprise and upsets their lives, breaking into them from the outside<sup>33</sup> and changing their direction; he is the god who promotes something new, an evolution, a change, and, thus, his oracle is complementary to Dodona, which promises the recovery of the *οἶκος* and a “return”. Apollo is *ἀρχηγέτης* (*Thuc.* 6.3.1), *ἡγεμῶν*, especially in connection with his sanctuary at Delphi, whose greatest development coincides with the age of colonization (Apollo was worshipped as “leader” from Sicily to the Sea of Azov, and many cities were named “Apollonia”).<sup>34</sup>

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33. See Zanetto (1996) 36.

34. See Burkert (2003) 290. Regarding the role of Delphi as “dispatcher” on colonial enterprises, see, for example, Herodotus 4.150 on the foundation of the settlement of Cyrene; also the article by Stanley Pease (1917).

Together, Delphi and Dodona signal, we might say, “the completeness” of the tragic hero, who, through Apollinian purification from his evils and from the grief of his νόσος, can rebuild his identity by recovering his roots under the sign of Zeus’ sacred Oak. Apollo of Delphi urges men to undertake a solitary journey of separation from the οἶκος, in order to attain the perfection of their humanity through the experience of suffering and the acknowledgement of their own limits (γνωθι σεαυτόν); Zeus Dodonaïos fortifies them in their origins and their destiny of familial belonging, reminding them of the value of the ties of γένος, ties that prevent them from conceiving themselves as lonely, self-sufficient individuals, abandoned to their personal destiny. The two poles of the sacred integrate with each other into a unitary and perfectly harmonious schema, one that actively engages men and intervenes in their lives, leading to the full accomplishment of their human nature. The complementary nature of those two aspects, namely of wandering and stability, is based on the nature itself of the hero, who achieves his full mythical-heroic stature thanks to this fundamental bipolarity: between, on the one hand, marginal, distant and wild places and, on the other hand, the centre of the city, where heroes settle with their cults.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Dodona and Delphi, through their synergy in both *Prometheus* and Sophoclean tragedy, perform, in a sense, the important role of “making the hero”: of shaping his identity and mythical stature.

## II) *Euripides: a dissonant alterity between the two oracles*

In Euripides, instead, things are very different: the harmonious consonance of the two oracles becomes a dissonant disharmony, the sacred order is troubled and overturned, resulting in chaos and the dissolution of the κόσμος encountered in *Prometheus Bound* and in Sophoclean tragedy.

### 4. The (failed) wanderings of Orestes (*Andromache* 884-90)

When Orestes appears suddenly on the stage of the *Andromache*, he is already perturbed by intrigues, deceptions, betrayals. He declares that he is on his way to the oracle of Dodona, yet he does not explain his motives; he has come through a number of places by chance, on a journey: we find

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35. See Brelich (1958) 349-50.

again here the theme of travel, of wanderings in strange lands, the figure of the wayfarer through the ways of the world...<sup>36</sup> In connection with Dodona, the theme of family ties reappears; indeed, Orestes adds that, because he has arrived at Phthia, he wants to have news of his cousin Hermione: *ἔρχομαι δὲ πρὸς Διὸς μαντεῖα / Δωδωναῖ'. ἐπεὶ δ' ἀφικόμην / Φθίαν, δοκεῖ μοι ξυγγενοῦς μαθεῖν περὶ / γυναικός* (885-8).

Zeus Dodonaios, protector of parental ties, appears to be speaking through him, to accompany him and to live in him: but, from here on, all the apparent order is dramatically upset “in a disordered household”, to use W. Allan’s words<sup>37</sup>. Orestes will not continue his journey to Dodona, but he will stay at Phthia and there he will plot the destruction of the sacred ties: in order to marry Hermione, he will have her legitimate husband Neoptolemus killed through the most impious murder he might have planned: one against a pilgrim visiting an oracle.

In fact, Neoptolemus is absent from the stage of the tragedy, because he is travelling to Delphi, where, as a suppliant, he wishes to expiate the guilty madness of having asked Apollo to provide him with reasons, in his own defense, for the murder of Achilles. From a god (and in particular from Apollo) it is an impiety to demand explanations: a man cannot afford the *ὑβρις* of seeking to understand the inscrutable plans of the gods. Thus, here too, Delphic Apollo is the god who requires purification from the *μίασμα* of guilt, who demands prayers and travels to expiate the *νόσος*. But all is distorted, again in this second journey that leads to Delphi (parallel and simultaneously distinct from the other) and it is distorted precisely because of the interference of the pilgrim directed to Dodona: Orestes announces the false news of Neoptolemus’ intention to destroy the temple of Delphi and the pilgrim is slaughtered on the path of his pilgrimage, never arriving, as a result, at the seat of the desired oracle.

A turbid story, in short, of family intrigues and the breaking of the *οἶκος*: even earlier, finding herself betrayed, Hermione had tried to kill Andromache, her husband’s concubine, and was then sheltered in the arms of her ex-betrothed, who had now killed her legitimate husband. As to Andromache, this time she will be given, as a bride, to Helenos. What this ac-

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36. As Allan remarks, “he must first reconnoitre the situation and so claims to be just passing by on the way to Dodona to consult the oracle of Zeus” (Allan 2000, 24).

37. Allan (2000) 74: “Orestes’ visit forges a link between the crisis in Neoptolemus’ household and his death at Delphi”.

tually represents is the disturbing dissolution of the sacred ties of family and fidelity, over which hovers the sinister image of the two paths of pilgrims who are never to arrive at Dodona and Delphi: on the contrary, one will turn against the other, in hostilities that, on the one hand, are eminently human, but on the other hand, in the course of the conflict, they will also divide the gods and break the alliances amongst them.

A. Giuliani takes as a starting point the Euripidean innovation of Neoptolemus' pious journey of expiation (which substitutes the traditional impious journey, undertaken by Neoptolemus in order to demand an explanation from Apollo regarding the injustice of his father's killing). Giuliani believes that Euripides, through this innovation, seeks to maintain a historical rivalry between Athens and Delphi, due to which, in literature as well, the oracle of Delphi would have suffered discredit, while Dodona would have been accorded a good reputation.<sup>38</sup> D. S. Robertson<sup>39</sup> and A. Garzya<sup>40</sup> also suggest a political interpretation of the negative connotations attributed to Apollo in the *Andromache* and, more specifically, of the tragic antithesis between the two sanctuaries of Delphi and Dodona. In particular, Robertson reads a "fierce attack on Delphi", and thus probably "anti-Spartan propaganda"<sup>41</sup>, in lines 1161 ff., in the passage, namely, where the Messenger, having delivered the news of the killing of young Neoptolemus, curses the god of Delphi, expressing all his human anger in front of an absurd destiny, inconceivable and pitiless, in which he cannot rationally discern any kind of justice: *πῶς ἄν οἶν εἶη σοφός;* (1165). The other line considered is 1241, where Thetis exhorts Peleus to bury the body of poor Achilles' son next to the altar of Delphi as *Δελφοῖς ὄνειδος;* to the shame of Delphians, as an eternal reminder of their infamy.

##### 5. The (failed) wanderings of Menoeceus (*Phoenissae* 977-89)

On the stage of the *Phoenissae* as well, we are at a crossroads which places the two oracles in open 'disagreement'. Teiresias, Apollo's privileged prophet — who in *Oedipus Rex* had correctly interpreted the words of the Delphic oracle, and who is immediately identifiable with Delphi, all the

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38. See Giuliani (2001) 156-8.

39. Robertson (1953).

40. Garzya (1952).

41. Robertson (1953), 60.

more so in a tragedy that is included in the Theban saga — has warned Creon: his son has to be sacrificed for Thebes' own good, because Apollo demands purification from the ancient *μίασμα*, of which Cadmus (the founder of the Theban dynasty) was guilty, having killed the dragon and sown his teeth. According to the uncompromising justice of Delphi, death, rather than a journey of purification, is the solution for the contagion: in this sense, the mention (though indirect) of Delphi appears atypical, different in comparison with what we have seen until now: there are no hero travels, not even offstage, since everything can be resolved within the tragedy's unity of space and time — through the sacrifice of the hero.

Yet, Creon is incapable to do what Teiresias orders him: *πᾶσιν γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι φιλότεκνος βίος, / οὐδ' ἂν τὸν αὐτοῦ παιδά τις δοίη κτανεῖν* (965-6) exclaims he through his tormented soul. And, thus, he summons his son Menoeceus and exhorts him to leave, to set out on a journey, to run away in a hurry (not to expiate, but to save himself from an act of expiation): after passing Delphi, the seat of the terrible oracle (*Δελφὸς περάσας*, 980), he will have to continue his journey through the Aetolian land up to Thesprotia, where the sacred Oak with the divine voice grows (*σεμνὰ Δωδώνης βᾶθρα*, 982). Once he has arrived there, he will have nothing to fear anymore, he will be rescued from death, from the cruelty of Apollo, who wants to take him away from his family — and Zeus will be with him. The god-protector of the *γένος*, the “god of the roots”, shall defend him, Creon will send him the money necessary for his survival and Menoeceus will finally be able to feel safe, because the god will follow him, he shall not be alone on his journey: *πόμπιμος ὁ δαίμων* (984).

It is clear that the two oracles are, once again, connected with a traditional problematic: namely, the issue of the balance between private sphere and public needs,<sup>42</sup> as well as the idea of safety resulting from the expiation of a *νόσος*. Hence, Delphi wants to dismiss the hero from the private sphere of belonging to his own *γένος*, while Dodona is seen indistinctly, at a distance, as the arrival-point of a dangerous journey that may help the hero to recover the safety of his affections and his roots. The mythical perspective is that of a journey of exile, which usually begins from an incident of murder,<sup>43</sup> more or less as in our case: the Euripidean ‘murder’ that gives rise to an exile journey is not, in fact, a traditional case of murder requiring a puri-

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42. See Medda (2006) 47.

43. See Brelich (1958) 300.

fiction journey (thus falling within the jurisdiction of Delphic Apollo), we are dealing, instead, with the danger of death that requires an “escape” from the homeland, a hospitable reception elsewhere, which will allow the hero to rebuild his own violated *οἶκος* (and this is perfectly included in Zeus Dodonaios’ sphere of influence). But Menoeceus will never arrive at Dodona: he will never set out on this journey, but will offer himself spontaneously as a sacrifice for the city of Thebes and Delphic Apollo, while his family will suffer an irreparable loss, with the nucleus of the *οἶκος* being dramatically deprived of one of its members, of the continuity of the *γένος* and of the stability of offspring. Indeed, the established order is upturned, every time the harmony between the two oracles fails to materialize.

Observations (II): Thus, in Euripides, we observe that Dodona is again placed, in theory, at the end of the hero’s wanderings — not as a prophecy, but as the real “goal” of the travels: physically, the wandering character directs his steps precisely to the sacred mountain where the ancient Oak of Zeus grows. However, in both cases discussed, this goal is never reached: “in the *Phoenissae*, [...] as in the *Andromache*, the expedition to Dodona never takes place”.<sup>44</sup> It is, probably, not by chance that what occurs in the end is the dissolution of family ties (which are a prerogative of Dodona), the loss of *γένος*, confusion and disorder within the *οἶκος*, whereby the sacredness of the ties of affection is violated. We may assert that when the pilgrim does not start from Dodona, he will also fail to arrive at his destination: his wandering, directed to the sacred Oak, is interrupted beforehand, as if he had neglected a tangible and ritual sign of devotion to Zeus Dodonaios, who as “god of the roots” requires that the human travel “starts from him”, physically and practically: only in this way shall he be able to assure a happy end under his constant, firm protection.

Moreover, in the case of Menoeceus, the journey is not a constructive one, of purification, growth and development, during which the hero faces dangers, overcoming them thanks to the help and closeness of the god, but rather an escape from dangers, a pretext in order not to face them and to save his skin. In the case of Orestes, the reason why he intends to go as far as Dodona is not even stated, yet, in any case, the context is again that of deception in order to avoid dangers: Orestes transforms the journey to Dodona into a journey to Delphi in order to kill Neoptolemus (a suppliant),

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44. Parke (1967) 80.

who embodies a dangerous presence, since he is a threat to his life and an obstacle to his intentions. Such a venture does not pertain to the category of “ritual travel”, to the sphere of the sacred, that of the growth and improvement of a human being; for this reason, it is destined to fail or to generate anguish and disorder. In all this, and perhaps not by chance, we may sense a certain discord and alterity between the oracle of Delphi and that of Dodona: it is as if the sacred harmony evident in their relationship in *Prometheus* and Sophoclean tragedy is shattered and the principles of ritual *κόσμος* are completely overturned.

Undeniably, in Euripides, Delphi still substantially maintains its tragic connotations, a role which effectively embodies a constant in surviving Greek tragedy: Apollo enters the life of the tragic hero as the god who gives him the signal to set off on his wanderings (this being the case of Neoptolemus) and upsets his firm sense of belonging to his *οἶκος*, forcing him into a painful, albeit more or less temporary, “uprooting”. Delphic Apollo, in Euripidean tragedy as well, is the austere god of supreme and perfect justice, who requires purification from the contagion of fault and, for this reason, subjects mortals to severe trials, usually travels, vicissitudes, isolation and separation from their points of reference — always in order that evil be expiated. Once the stain of the *νόσος* has been washed clean, the hero will then be able to return to a renewed *κόσμος* or, otherwise, never to return again: namely, if recovery of the original purity cannot be obtained but through the extreme option of death.

However, in Euripides, this role of Delphi stands in sharp ‘disagreement’ with that of Dodona. In both examples that we have considered, the structure of the plot is substantially the same: there is always a character (Creon or Orestes) who stands in opposition to the oracle of Apollo or who, in any case, does something in opposition to Delphic devotion, utilizing as a pretext the ‘adversary’ oracle of Dodona — justifying, in a sense, his impious action in the name of the sacred Oak of Dodona. Everything is reversed, the sacred is corrupted by the profane and neither Delphi nor Dodona communicate with each other anymore. The two oracles proceed along parallel paths, but also in clear contradiction between themselves, as if the one excluded the other: harmony becomes dissonance when the *κόσμος* of the religious traditions is upset by a merely human logic that undermines the very sense of the sacred. There exists no longer harmony within the divine realm and this coincides with a subversion of all that is sacred and inviolable in the human sphere, like, for instance, the ties of *γένος*

and familial affection, as well as the ancient value of producing offspring. There exists, in short, substantial discord, which may also mirror a historicopolitical rivalry, a real tension in the relationship between the two sanctuaries, even though we do not possess much proof of it. D. Marotta notes, for instance, that in the Herodotean tale about the doves of Dodona (2.52 ff.) — a story which calls into play the three sanctuaries of Thebes, Siwa and Dodona — resonates their common political opposition to Delphi;<sup>45</sup> he finds further evidence of this hypothesis in the story of a prodigious event in Delphi narrated by Plutarch in his *Life of Nicias*: in memory of the victory over the Persians, the Athenians offered to the sanctuary a golden Palladion with a bronze palm, but some crows alighted on the gift and remained there pecking for days, removing all the golden fruits from the palm and dropping them onto the ground. What Marotta underlines is the fact that the Athenians, as Plutarch says,<sup>46</sup> considered this strange tale an invention of the inhabitants of Delphi, coined at the instigation of the Syracusans with the obvious purpose of discrediting the Athenian πόλις; hence, according to this scholar, it is clear that the Athenians distrusted the Delphic sanctuary: it was, thus, necessary to turn to other oracular centres, for instance precisely to Siwa and Dodona.<sup>47</sup> Beside the difficulty of verifying the complex system of historical relationships between the oracles of Delphi and Dodona, we must also consider that the alleged anti-Delphic allusions mainly revolve around mortals and their impiety — mortals who, consequently, also corrupt the sphere of the sacred. Hence, as is often the case with the alleged Euripidean attacks on traditional religion, we should not, perhaps, interpret such instances as exemplifying a real tension between those two seats of the sacred, but rather as an artistic-literary provocation, which does scarcely need to correspond to a sacred-historical reality.

In conclusion, we may assert that in Euripidean tragedy we encounter a sort of contravention of an ancient rule of sacred alternation between the two principal oracle sites, an idea all-too-evident in *Prometheus Bound* and in Sophocles: in Euripides divine harmony mysteriously fails. The ritual order at some point shatters, annulling the perfect complementarity between the two ancient and prophetic poles of the sacred: a complementa-

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45. See Marotta (2001-2002) 138.

46. *Οἱ δὲ ταῦτα μὲν ἔφασαν εἶναι Δελφῶν πλάσματα, πεπεισμένων ὑπὸ Συρακοσίων* (Plut. *Life of Nicias* 13.4).

47. See Marotta (2001-2002) 147 n. 57.

rity, moreover, that we should think of as a concept firmly rooted in the collective mind, one which emerged naturally in a collective genre such as drama — a concept of which Euripides takes, nevertheless, the liberty of overturning and provocatively questioning on the free stage of the Athenian theatre and *τραγωδία*. Thus, his heroes indeed travel under the protection and the supervision of gods: from home to home, in a sense; further, their homecoming (if it ever comes about) renders them more self-aware, more experienced in life, in its sufferings and its dangers — more heroes, we may say. On the other hand, when the bright order of the Sacred is upset, the thoughts engendered by the theatrical performance remain the only way to recover the meaning of ancient myths, of ancient Gods — and for mortals to find their own way. They remain the only way to remember that a hero's (and an ordinary human's) story must start from Delphi and return to Dodona, namely to one's roots, one's first and strongest ties of affection: the beginning and the end of every virtuous journey.

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