

ARISTOPHANES' PARODY IN THE *RANAE* 907–933:  
A GUIDE OF UNDERSTANDING THE TECHNIQUE  
OF SILENCE IN GREEK TRAGEDY



ABSTRACT: In Aristophanes' *Ranae* (907-933) Euripides accuses Aeschylus of deceiving his audience by replacing the *logos* of his characters with silence. This parody brings up the issue of on-stage silence in tragedy. My article aims to show that: (a) Silence on tragic stage is a technique particular to Aeschylus, who creates strong dramatic effect with his silent characters; silence was an instrument of reaction by which they expressed their tragic condition. (b) Aeschylus paved the way for the introduction of the third actor through this technique, by producing effective dramatic scenes with two speaking actors and a silent one. (c) Both Sophocles and Euripides seem to be conscious of the dramatic and scenic effects of Aeschylus' technique and manipulate silence to underline dramatic intensity and shift and/or handle the plot of their plays; but silent tragic characters (such as those of Aeschylus) do not appear in their plays.

THE WELL-KNOWN *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Ranae* begins with an attack made by Euripides, who accuses Aeschylus of deceiving his audience by replacing the *logos* of his characters with silence. Euripides cites the examples of Niobe and Achilles, who remained veiled on stage without uttering a word until the middle of the play; when they finally decided to speak, they uttered sonorous gibberish. Euripides considers the dramatic technique used by Aeschylus to be trickery:

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[1] Aristophanes *Ranae* 907–933

ΕΥ. καὶ μὴν ἑμαυτὸν μὲν γε τὴν ποίησιν οἶός εἰμι,  
 ἐν τοῖσιν ὑστάτοις φράσω, τοῦτον δὲ πρῶτ' ἐλέγξω,  
 ὡς ἦν ἀλαζὼν καὶ φέναξ οἷοις τε τοὺς θεατὰς  
 ἐξηπάτα μῶρους λαβῶν παρὰ Φρυνίχῳ τραφέντας. 910  
 πρῶτιστα μὲν γὰρ ἓνα τιν' ἂν καθίσεν ἐγκαλύφας,  
 Ἀχιλλέα τιν' ἢ Νιόβην, τὸ πρόσωπον οὐχὶ δεικνύς,  
 πρόσχημα τῆς τραγωδίας, γρύζοντας οὐδὲ τουτί.  
 ΔΙ. μὰ τὸν Δι' οὐ δῆθ'. ΕΥ. ὁ δὲ χορὸς γ' ἤρειδεν ὄρμαθούς ἂν  
 μελῶν ἐφεξῆς τέτταρας ξυνεχῶς ἄν οἱ δ' ἐσίγων. 915  
 [.....]

ΕΥ. κάπειτ' ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα ληρήσειε καὶ τὸ δρᾶμα  
 ἤδη μεσοίη, ῥήματ' ἂν βόεια δώδεκ' εἶπεν,  
 ὀφρῶς ἔχοντα καὶ λόφους, δεῖν' ἄττα μορμορωπά, 925  
 ἄγνωτα τοῖς θεωμένοις. ΑἴΣ. οἴμοι τάλας. ΔΙ. σιώπα.  
 ΕΥ. σαφὲς δ' ἂν εἶπεν οὐδὲ ἔν— ΔΙ. μὴ πρῶτε τοὺς ὀδόντας.  
 ΕΥ. ἀλλ' ἢ Σκαμάνδρους ἢ τάφρους ἢ π' ἀσπίδων ἐπόντας  
 γουπαιέτους χαλκηλάτους καὶ ῥήμαθ' ἰππόκομηνα,  
 ἃ ξυμβαλεῖν οὐ ῥάδι' ἦν. ΔΙ. νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς ἐγὼ γούν 930  
 ἤδη ποτ' ἐν μακροῦ χρόνῳ νυκτὸς διηγρύπνησα  
 τὸν ξουθὸν ἰπαλαεκτρονόνα ζητῶν τίς ἐστιν ὄρισ.  
 ΑἴΣ. σημεῖον ἐν ταῖς ναυσὶν ὤμαθέστατ' ἐνεγέγραπτο

EU. As regards myself and the kind of poet my work reveals me to be, I'll come to that at the end of my speech, but begin by exposing him. I want to show what a charlatan and a fraudster he was in the theatre. He kept on duping those stupid spectators who'd grown up with Phrynichos' plays. At the start of each work he liked to produce a veiled figure to sit on the stage, for example Achilles or Niobe, too; he wouldn't reveal their mask but used them for purely showy effect, just stuck there brooding in silence. DI. I swear that's true. EU. But instead the chorus would dump great chains of songs, four lyric sequences strung together, with the characters stuck there in silence. .... EU. [*Resuming*] Then when he'd finished with all this nonsense and half the play had passed, he'd give his character twelve huge words, each one as large as an ox, and all of them shaggy with eyebrows and crests, like frightening bogey faces. They were words that nobody understood. AESCH. [*roaring*] I can't take any more! DI. Keep quiet! EU. His language was never remotely clear — DI. [*to Aeschylus*]. Will you please

stop grinding your teeth! EU. But perpetual talk of Skamander rivers and ditches and emblems on shields of griffin-eagles in beaten bronze. His words were enormous crags that were hard to interpret at all. DI. By the gods, I can certainly vouch for that! I once lay awake the whole night long unable to sleep while I puzzled over what kind of bird he might have meant by his phrase “tawny horse-cock”. AESCH. It’s a sign that is painted on prows of ships — your ignorance knows no bounds!<sup>1</sup>

References to this Aristophanic parody are found in Aeschylus’ *Vita* (19–23 διὰ τὸ πλεονάζειν τῷ βάρει τῶν προσώπων κωμωδεῖται παρὰ Ἀριστοφάνει. ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῇ Νιόβῃ ἕως τρίτου μέρους ἐπικαθημένη τῷ τάφῳ τῶν παίδων οὐδὲν φθέγγεται ἐγκεκαλυμμένη· ἐν δὲ τοῖς Ἐκτορος λύτροις Ἀχιλλεὺς ὁμοίως ἐγκεκαλυμμένος οὐ φθέγγεται, πλὴν ἐν ἀρχαῖς ὀλίγα πρὸς Ἐρμῆν ἀμοιβαῖα) and the Scholia *ad Ar. Ran.* 911 (εἰκὸς τὸν ἐν τοῖς Φρυξίν Ἀχιλλέα ... ἢ τὸν ἐν Μυρμιδόσιν, ὃς μέχρι τριῶν ἡμερῶν [τριῶν μερῶν?: τρίτου μέρους] οὐδὲν φθέγγεται).<sup>2</sup> It seems that Niobe’s silence was featured in the tragedy of the same name, *Niobe*; and Achilles’ silence occurred in the *Myrmidons* and the *Phrygians*, which, together with the *Nereids*, probably made up a connected trilogy under the conventional title *Achilleis* (a satyr play is not identified).<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes’ parody in fact raises the issue of silent tragic actors on stage.<sup>4</sup> As I hope to show, the instances of silence afford the basic terms of understanding silence as a technique of ancient tragedy, although Aeschylus’ *Niobe* and the *Achilleis* trilogy are fragmentary.<sup>5</sup>

I will begin with the parodied silence of Achilles.<sup>6</sup> Based on the narrative of the Homeric *Iliad*, which was probably the poet’s source, the dramatic stages of the plays comprising the *Achilleis* trilogy may be reconstructed approximately as follows. In the *Myrmidons*, the wrathful (*μηνίων*) Achilles refuses to join the battle despite the constant pleas or embassies of the Achaeans. He only gives in to the plea of his friend Patroclus, who

1. Text from Wilson (2007); transl. by Halliwell (2015).

2. Text from Radt (1985) T. 1. 33 (for Aeschylus’ *Vita*) and 239 (for the Scholia).

3. The title *Ἀχιλλεύς* is not attested in ancient sources. The titles of all three tragedies (*Μυρμιδόνες*, *Νηρηίδες*, *Φρύγες* ἢ *Ἐκτορος Λύτρα*) are attested in the *Catalogue of Aeschylus’ Dramas* (*Κατάλογος τῶν Αἰσχύλου δραμάτων*), for which see Radt (1985) T. 78.58–59. For the date of the performance, see below, n. 14.

4. Taplin (1972); Tarkov (1982); Hourmouziades (1991) 190–196; Sommerstein (1996) 235–238; Montiglio (2000) 216–220; Michelakis (2002) 37–40.

5. For silence in Greek tragedy, Aélion (1983–1984); Hourmouziades (1991) 179–227.

6. See Taplin (1972) 77–97; Michelakis (2002) 22–57.

replaces him by wearing his armour. The death of Patroclus plunges Achilles into deep agony and prompts him to join the battle himself if only to seek revenge on Hector for killing Patroclus. The subject of the *Nereids* would have been the well-known making of the armour narrated in *Iliad* 18 (the Nereid Thetis, Achilles' mother, commands Hephaestus to fashion armour for her son) and Achilles' going to battle and murder of Hector. In the third play, namely the *Phrygians*, Achilles would have given Hector's body back to Priam, who would have taken it back to Troy for the funeral.<sup>7</sup>

The plot I have outlined is confirmed by the surviving fragments. The fragments of the *Myrmidons* (fr. 131–142 Radt) express the attempts of some to persuade Achilles to return to battle.<sup>8</sup> In fr. 131 they beg him and in fr. 132 they probably lecture him:<sup>9</sup>

[2] Aeschylus *Myrmidons* fr. 131.1–2<sup>10</sup>

τάδε μὲν λεύσσεις φαίδιμ' Ἀχιλλεῦ,  
δορυλυμάντους Δαναῶν μόχθους

You see, great Achilles, that the fights of the Achaeans have been broken into pieces by the (Trojan) spears.

[3] Aeschylus *Myrmidons* fr. 132

Φθιώτ' Ἀχιλλεῦ, τί ποτ' ἀνδροδαίκτον ἀκούων,  
ἰή, κόπον οὐ πελάθεις ἐπ' ἀρωγάν;

Phthian Achilles, why ever hearing the manslaughter crash, iê, do you not go near to help?

7. For attempts at reconstructing the *Achilleis*: Croiset (1894); Schadewaldt (1936); Mette (1963) 112–121; Döhle (1967); Kossatz-Deissmann (1978) 10–32; Hourmouziades (1991) 192–195; Moreau (1996); West (2000). Scholars generally think that the image of Aeschylus' Achilles reflects Homer's *Iliad*; objection by Deschamps (2010), who argues that through dramatic silence and immobility Aeschylus deconstructs the epic prototype of Achilles.

8. Cf. Garzya (1995).

9. See Radt (1985) 240–241; Stella (1936); Goerschen (1950).

10. The text of Aeschylus' fragments from Radt (1985).

The meter of both fragments is lyric, so they belong possibly to the chorus. His soldiers, the Myrmidons, who would have comprised the chorus of the play of the same name, would have participated in the attempt to win Achilles over and they would probably have been the first to try to do so during their *parodos*. The attempt would have been continued by some characters or an embassy, which would not necessarily have been composed of the same heroes as those in the *Iliad*.

Another papyrus fragment confirms the fact that Achilles broke his silence by replying to Phoenix.<sup>11</sup> Achilles declares at this point that he has remained silent for a long time and did not reply to those speaking very harshly to him:

[4] Aeschylus *Myrmidons* fr. 132b 6–9

<AX.> Φοῖ]νιξ γεραιέ, τῶν | ἐμῶν φρε[νῶν  
πολ]λῶν ἀκούων | δ|υστόμων λ[  
πάλ]αι σιωπῶ κοῦδ|εν [. ]στ . μ[  
] ἀντέλεξα. σὲ δε. | [. ]αξιωτ[.

Old Phoenix, dear to my heart! Though for a long time I hear words which are difficult to be uttered, I remain silent and never did answer anything. But you merit (an answer)

The adjective *δυστόμων*, in particular, which describes his visitors' words, suggests that threats were possibly delivered against Achilles. Indeed, in fr. 132c, the hero angrily comments on the threat of stoning:<sup>12</sup>

[5] Aeschylus *Myrmidons* Aeschylus *Myrmidons* fr. 132c

<AX.> λεύσονσι τοῦμὸν σῶμα· μὴ δόκει ποτὲ  
πέτρ[ο]ις καταξathέντα Πηλέως γόνον  
... ] . . [ . ] . ( . ) ησειν Τρωϊκὴν ἀνὰ χθόνα

.....

11. Papyrus Florentina, mox P.S.I. 1472 (with Radt [1985] 244). See Norsa – Vitelli 1934 (968–978); Rea (1971).

12. Michelakis (2002) 24–25 (where the stoning is parallelized to the historical practice of ostracism).

They will stone my body. You should never think that the son of Peleus,  
having been wounded by stones, will be (in the battle) on the Trojan land

.....

Although Achilles broke his silence in the presence of Phoenix, it is likely that his anger was not reduced. In reality Achilles yielded only to Patroclus, to whom he gave his armour for the battle the latter was to undertake in his stead. The succession of events is clearly shown by other fragments. In three of these (fr. 135, 136, 137) Achilles mourns over Patroclus in amorous despair, evoking the ‘reverent company of his thighs’ (for instance, fr. 136 *μηρῶν τε τῶν σῶν εὐσεβῆς ὀμιλία*).<sup>13</sup> In a fourth fragment he asks Antilochus to understand his pain for the dead youth (fr. 138 *Ἀντίλοχ’, ἀποίμωξόν με τοῦ τεθνηκότος / τὸν ζῶντα μᾶλλον· τὰμὰ γὰρ διοίχεται*). In another fragment, he exclaims that there is need for weapons (fr. 140 *ὄπλων ὄπλων δεῖ*). We may therefore suppose that the hero had been silent from the beginning of the play. Vengeful Achilles appeared seated, without speaking — perhaps he had his head covered, as in a series of Attic vases depicting the embassies in his tent (*LIMC* 1.2 440, 441, 442, 444, 445, 446, 448, 453):<sup>14</sup> the chorus and then other persons passed in front of him and tried to persuade him; Achilles’ silence would express his great rage.<sup>15</sup>

One of the fragments preserves a lyric that confirms Aristophanes’ joke: it is the *ξουθὸς ἱππαλεκτροῶν* (fr. 134), which made the comic poet stay up all night out of a desire to find out what this meant; see [1]. According to the interpretation given by Aeschylus himself in the *Ranae*, the *ἱππαλεκτροῶν* is a carved decoration on the stern of a ship. We know from the *Iliad* 16.122–129 that Achilles’ wrath at length abates when the Trojans set Protesilaus’ ship on fire. Achilles then asks Patroclus to rise and put on his own equipment; otherwise their ships will be taken and then there will be no

13. For the implied homosexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, Dover (1978) 197–198 with n. 2; Michelakis (2002) 42–46; Fantuzzi (2012) 225 and 226–229.

14. For probable influence of the Aeschylean Achilles on contemporary vase paintings, Döhle (1967); Kossatz-Deissmann (1978) 10–13 and (1981) 439–454; Shapiro (1994) 18–19; Fantuzzi (2012) 179–180. The fact that these paintings belong to the early fifth century BC drove scholars to suppose that Aeschylus’ *Achilleis* should be dated around 490 BC; see Michelakis (2002) 31 n. 21. This argument has been disputed by Döhle (1967) 112–121; cf. Sommerstein (2008) 135 and (2010) 15 n. 8, who argued that the *Achilleis* trilogy, “one of Aeschylus’ most celebrated productions” cannot easily be placed earlier than the poet’s first victory at 484 BC.

15. Cf. the ideas of Körte (1935); Goerschen (1950); Di Benedetto (1967).

escape (*Iliad* 16.126–129). Achilles' breaking of his silence in the *Myrmidons* was probably linked to the same event. However, the fact that Achilles, who had been silent for all this time, would break his silence in order to speak about the decoration of the burning ship was bizarre and lent itself to comic exploitation by Aristophanes. In fact, Achilles' strange mention of the *ἱππαλεκτρῶν* of the ship underlies Aristophanes' ironic comment, which highlights his parody of the long silence of Achilles, contrasting the hero's wrath to the gravity of the Aeschylean word *ἱππαλεκτρῶν*.

The silence in the third tragedy, which has the double title *The Phrygians* or *The Ransoming of Hector* (fr. 263–272 Radt), can be understood scenically and dramatically along similar lines. Since the dramatic plot dealt with the return of Hector's dead body to his father, the play, in which the chorus would have been comprised of the Phrygian followers of Priam, would once again have begun with a silent Achilles, who would have covered his face. The silence would primarily have indicated his mourning for the death of Patroclus, mixed with rage. We know from the *Iliad* that Achilles mistreated Hector's corpse for twelve days, tying it to his chariot and dragging it around. This is why Hermes himself conducted Priam to the tent of the enraged hero. A silent Achilles in the beginning of the play would encapsulate most effectively the previous dramatic events, bringing out the hero's accumulated rage and mourning.<sup>16</sup>

In this way, we find that Aeschylus repeated the same motif of dramatic silence in the trilogy, featuring the same hero in a similar manner. The *Myrmidons*, as noted, contain a metatheatrical self-comment by the tragic hero on his own silence. This must be a technique which is consciously put to use by Aeschylus scenically and dramatically. The silent Achilles is not an indifferent silent character but a dramatically charged hero. His silence is a condition that irritates and worries the other heroes of the play confronting it. However, the confrontation, in dramatic terms, evolves in perfect accord with the situation of the silent hero. Thus, in the beginning of the *Myrmidons*, the silent Achilles is only an angry hero. As the characters seeking to persuade him parade in front of him, his silence becomes a way to react to their persistence. By the time the hero is forced to break his silence, the dramatic situation has moved from rage to grappling with a dilemma: should he insist on defending his slighted dignity or abandon the

16. Sommerstein, (1996) *ad* Aristoph. *Ran.* 923–926, thinks that Aristophanes' criticism here refers to a narrative of Patroclus' death; instead, Michelakis (2002) 40 n. 36, thinks that these lines reflect criticism of Achilles' breaking of his silence.

Greeks, leaving them at the mercy of Hector and the Trojans? Achilles' silence, then, does not denote passivity and inertia, but it is a device by which action is motivated and the plot is advanced. Likewise in the *Phrygians*, the breaking of Achilles' silence would have been connected with a spectacular change in the hero when he came to feel compassion for Priam because he saw in him his own father, destined never to see his son return from Troy.<sup>17</sup>

In this light we can also reconstruct Niobe's silence as parodied in the *Ranae*.<sup>18</sup> The theme of Aeschylus' *Niobe* (fr. 154a–167b Radt) would probably be the cruel fate of the titular character, who was punished with the slaughter of all her children because she had dared to brag about her seven sons and seven daughters, whose number rendered her more fertile than Leto, mother of the twins Apollo and Artemis by Zeus.<sup>19</sup> In two of the surviving fragments of the play the heroine, her head covered, is said to sit at the grave of her children (fr. 157a *τὶ δαὶ σὸν θάσσεις τάσδε τυμβήρεις ἔδρας / φάροι καλυπτός[, ὃ ξένη]*), mourning incessantly for their death for three days (fr. 154a, 6–8 *τριταῖ]ον ἡμαρ τόνδ' ἐφημένη τάφον / τέκνοις ἐπώϊζει — Ὑ τοῖς τεθνηκόσιν / ]υσα τήν τάλαιναν εὔμορφον φνήν*).<sup>20</sup> If we attempt to apply this information to what Aristophanes mentions in his parody (that Niobe remained silent until the middle of the play), we are led to the hypothesis that Niobe appeared mourning from the beginning of the play. The image of the heroine lying motionless and silent implies that Niobe had long been lamenting in reaction to earlier events. Occurring, as it seems, in the beginning of the play, Niobe's silence has the dynamic of a dramatic event which functions as the starting point of the plot of the drama.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, a clear reference to a silent *dramatis persona* is found in another fragmentary tragedy by Aeschylus, the *Edoni* (the first play of his *Lycurgeia* trilogy). In fr. 61 Radt, the King of the Edoni in Thrace, namely Lycurgus, who has arrested Dionysus in an effort to ban Bacchic worship, mocks the god for his appearance. The fragment is cited in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*. Here the poet parodies the content of this scene (134–135 *καί σ' ὃ νεανίσχ' ὄστις εἶ, κατ' Αἰσχύλον / ἐκ τῆς Λυκουργείας ἐρέσθαι*

17. Hourmouziades (1991) 195. A fine account of Aeschylus in the *Ranae*, though from the wider perspective of “Aeschylus' bloated art of tragedy”, is found in Rosenbloom (2017) 58–60; cf. Scharffenberger (2007).

18. For Niobe's silence, Taplin 1972 (60–62).

19. For a reconstruction of Aeschylus' *Niobe*, Hermann (1828); Reinhardt (1934); Schade-waldt (1934); Steffen (1952); Garzya (1987), (1990).

20. Cf. the depictions in *LIMC* VI.2 (“Niobe”, nn. 9–20).

21. Hourmouziades (1991) 191–192.



*βούλομαι*) by comically criticizing the effeminate appearance of the poet Agathon:

[6] Aeschylus *Edoni* fr. 61 (Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae* 136–145)<sup>22</sup>

ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννης; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἡ στολή;

Where does this effeminate man come from? Which is his country? What is this kind of clothing?

τίς ἢ τὰ ραξίς τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος  
λαλεῖ κροκωτῶ; τί δὲ δορὰ κεκροφάλω;  
τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς οὐ ξύμφορον.  
τίς δαὶ κατόπτρον καὶ ξίφος κοινωνία; 140  
σύ τ' αὐτὸς, ὦ παῖ, πότερον ὡς ἀνὴρ τρέφει;  
καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικαί;  
ἀλλ' ὡς γυνὴ δῆτ'; εἶτα ποῦ τὰ τιθία;  
τί φῆς; τί σιγαῖς; ἀλλὰ δῆτ' ἐκ τοῦ μέλους  
ζητῶ σ', ἐπειδὴ γ' αὐτὸς οὐ βούλει φράσαι;

What confusion of life is this? What can fancy lyre say to saffron dress, or ordinary lyre to hairnet? Why athlete's oil-flask and woman's breast-band together? What have mirror and sword to do with one another? And you, my child, are you being brought up as a man? Then where's your prick? Your cloak? Your Lakonian shoes? But perhaps you're really a woman? Then where are your tits? What's your answer? Why this silence? Do I have to seek you from the song you sang, since you won't explain yourself?<sup>23</sup>

Lines 144–145 of Aristophanes' text, in which Agathon's silence is criticized, are particularly important to my subject. If these lines reflect the impression of a relevant scene in Aeschylus' *Edoni*, we can suppose that Lycurgus mocked the arrested Dionysus for his appearance by highlighting elements of effeminacy, while the god remained silent during these attacks and pro-

22. From Ar. *Thesm.* 136–145 just cited, only line 136 is considered (by Radt) to be a genuine Aeschylean fragment; in lines 137–145, the words considered as Aeschylean are typed *diductis litteris*.

23. Transl. by Halliwell (2015).

bably refused to answer the king's pressing questions. Dionysus would reply with silence, since he was contemptuously indifferent to Lycurgus' opposition and verbal attacks. For his part, Lycurgus, feeling like a powerful prosecutor, would regard Dionysus' silence as evidence of weakness.

From the surviving tragedies of Aeschylus, the dramatic impact of the central hero's silence during the initial scene(s) of the play, as we supposed in the cases of Niobe and Achilles, can also be detected in the *Prometheus Vinctus*, although Aeschylus' authorship of the play has been disputed.<sup>24</sup> In the prologue of this tragedy (1–87), Hephaestus, Kratos, and Bia chain Prometheus to the rock of Caucasus; they act as agents of Zeus in the 'untrodden solitude' of the Scythian land (2 *Σκύθην ἐς οἶμον, ἄβροτον εἰς ἐρημίαν*).<sup>25</sup> Zeus takes revenge on the Titan because of the latter's benefaction to humankind. Despite his compliance, Hephaestus does not hide his sympathy for Prometheus' torment, his own shame for participating in the crucifixion and his disapproval of Zeus' arbitrary act. By contrast, the two personifications of Zeus' authority express, through Kratos, their absolute identification with the raw violence exercised by the new lord of the gods. Throughout the crucifixion, Prometheus endures torment silently and does not reply to Kratos' insults.<sup>26</sup> The poet brings the silence of the Titan to the attention of the audience: Hephaestus addresses him twice (19–20 *ἄκοντά σ' ἄκων δυσλύτοις χαλκεύμασιν / προσπασσαλεύσω τῶδ' ἀπανθρώπων πάγω*, 'against my will, no less than yours, I must rivet you with brazen bonds no hand can loose to this desolate crag'; 66 *αἰαῖ Προμηθεῦ, σῶν ὑπερστένω πόρων*, 'alas, Prometheus, I groan for your sufferings') to which no response is given. Prometheus' silence does not suggest passivity and inertia but is rather his reaction to punishment: the Titan endures his torment in silence, showing contempt for the scale of his suffering and the arbitrary conduct of Zeus.<sup>27</sup> His stance is better understood when, after the departure of the

24. Scholars do not agree on the date of the play, the nature of its trilogy (below n. 29), its sophistic language and ideas, stylistic and metrical differences, staging techniques, the number of the speaking persons in the prologue. See Herington (1970); Griffith (1977); Ruffell (2012) 13–19 (a survey). Above all, see the recent monograph of Manousakis (2020), which severely disputes Aeschylean authorship.

25. Text from West (1990); transl. by Smyth (1926).

26. For Prometheus' initial silence, Taplin (1972) 78–79; Griffith (1977) 106, 117, 146; Mastrorarde (1979) 115 n. 7; Hourmouziades (1991) 196–198.

27. At this point, my colleague Ioannes Petropoulos drew my attention to the Nekyia scene in Homer (*Od.* 11. 543–567), where Ajax's silence may indicate contempt and criticism similar to that of Prometheus; moreover, Pseudo-Longinus, in a remark on Ajax's silence in the Nekyia scene, observes that silence can correspond to speech and even transcend

crucifiers, Prometheus is left alone and breaks his silence (88–126). His speech sunders the chaos of ether apart and proclaims before all the elements of Nature his indomitable spirit in the face of Zeus' utter violence:

[7] Aeschylus *Prometheus Vincetus* 88–92

ὦ δῖος αἰθῆρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί  
 ποταμῶν τε πηγαὶ ποντίων τε κυμάτων  
 ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα παμμήτωρ τε γῆ,  
 καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ·  
 ἴδεσθέ μ' οἶα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός.

O you bright sky of heaven, you swift-winged breezes, you river-waters, and infinite laughter of the waves of ocean, O universal mother Earth, and you, all-seeing orb of the sun, to you I call! See what I, a god, endure from the gods.

Thus, Prometheus' silence and his breach of silence in the prologue of the *Prometheus Vincetus* has dramatic effect,<sup>28</sup> since it registers from the very beginning the two poles of the powerful cosmic conflict around which the play and the entire trilogy (the *Prometheia*), are organized: Zeus's capriciousness versus the indomitable spirit of the Titan benefactor.<sup>29</sup>

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it when it emanates from magnanimity (*Subl.* 9.2): ἕψος μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα. ὅθεν καὶ φωνῆς δίχα θαυμάζεται ποτε ψιλλὴ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἢ ἔννοια δι' αὐτὸ τὸ μεγαλόφρον, ὡς ἢ τοῦ Αἴαντος ἐν Νεκρίᾳ σιωπὴ μέγα καὶ παντός ὑψηλότερον λόγον.

28. Griffith (1977) 117, who disputes Aeschylus' authorship of the play, calls Prometheus' silence in the prologue "effective and dramatically successful"; but he considers it to be "more natural than that of Niobe and Achilles" on the grounds that the suffering Prometheus has nothing to say, and "Hephaestus is virtually speaking for him" (p. 106).
29. For the Prometheus trilogy (perhaps under the entire title *Prometheis*), see Radt (1985) 302–320. In the *Catalogue* (T 78, 14c. 14d. 15a) the plays of the trilogy are attested in the following order: *Prometheus Vincetus*, *Prometheus Pyrphoros*, *Prometheus Lyomenos*. But the scholiast at *PV* 511 and 522 mentions the *Prometheus Lyomenos* next to the *Prometheus Vincetus*. Thus, the order proposed by Welcker (1844), and supported by scholars, was: *Prometheus Vincetus*, *Prometheus Lyomenos*, *Prometheus Pyrphoros* with the idea that the *Pyrphoros* might refer to the establishment of a later Athenian cult of Prometheus as *pyrphoros*, mentioned in Soph. *OC* 55–56. This order has been questioned by Pohlenz (1954) 77–78; Fitton-Brown (1959) 53; Griffith (1977) 15–16. See West 2007 (=1979), who argued for the *Prometheus Pyrphoros* as the first play, not the third.

In the light of the above, the silence of Prometheus can also be used to address the much-discussed problem of the number of actors in the prologue scene, which belongs to the arguments that question Aeschylus' authorship of the play.<sup>30</sup> Prometheus is one of the *dramatis personae* in the scene and his silence is a part of his punishment, but the poet does not exceed the number of two speaking persons (Hephaestus, Kratos) throughout the course of the Titan's silence. However, silence actually makes Prometheus the potential (/stand-by) third actor, who becomes active when he breaks his silence after the other characters have left.<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of the second episode, Prometheus refers to another of his silences, which however is different from that in the prologue.<sup>32</sup> He apologizes for preferring to be silent to Zeus about his earlier benefaction, through which he became the most powerful of gods:

[8] Aeschylus *Prometheus Vincetus* 436–443

μήτοι χλιδῆ δοκεῖτε μηδ' ἀθαδία  
σιγᾶν με· συννοία δὲ δάπτομαι κέαρ,  
ὄρων ἐμαυτὸν ὧδε προσελούμενον.  
καίτοι θεοῖσι τοῖς νέοις τούτοις γέρα  
τίς ἄλλος ἢ ἄγὼ παντελῶς διώρισεν;  
ἀλλ' ἀτὰ σιγῶ, καὶ γὰρ εἰδνίασιν ἄν  
ὑμῖν λέγοιμι· τὰν βροτοῖς δὲ πῆματα  
ἀκούσαθ' ...

No, do not think it is from pride or even from willfulness that I am silent. Painful thoughts devour my heart as I behold myself maltreated in this way. And yet who else but I definitely assigned their prerogatives to these upstart gods? But I do not speak of this; for my tale would tell you nothing except what you know. Still, listen to the miseries that beset mankind—how they were witless before and I made them have sense and endowed them with reason. I will not speak to upbraid mankind but to set forth the friendly purpose that inspired my blessing.

30. Herington (1970) 88–89.

31. This is an additional factor that supports the assignment of the *Prometheus Vincetus* to the mature plays of Aeschylus. See Griffith (1977) 146; Hourmouziades (1991) 196–197.

32. For the need to distinguish between Prometheus' silence in the prologue and his reference to silence at line 437, Griffith (1977) 116–118.

This passage is very important. It distinguishes between silence and concealment (/unveiling) of events and, although not referring to a speechless situation, may reflect aspects of the reception of Prometheus' silence in the prologue by its mention of *χλιδή* (pride) and *αὐθαδία* (wilfulness). It is worth noticing that Aeschylean silence is parodied in Aristophanes, *Ranae* 909–910 with almost identical wording: *ὥς ἦν ἀλαζῶν καὶ φέναξ* (see [1]).<sup>33</sup>

Cassandra could also claim the role of a silent third actor in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the first play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, which was presented in 458 BC.<sup>34</sup> Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief, brings Priam's daughter, the prophetess Cassandra, with him from Troy as a war trophy. The girl sits with him in the royal carriage and then stays inside without speaking or moving when Agamemnon is welcomed by Clytemnestra in the third episode (810–974). Cassandra's presence is not mentioned by Agamemnon, Clytemnestra or the chorus. Only towards the end of the scene, Agamemnon, preparing to walk on the red carpet after having given in to Clytemnestra's request, entreats the Queen to receive the captive girl with kindness. Agamemnon does not mention Cassandra's name; he only says that she was given to him by the army as booty after the sacking of her homeland (950–955). Clytemnestra does not respond to Agamemnon's pleas; it is as if she had never heard them. The Queen exits the stage after Agamemnon and only the carriage with Cassandra remains in the orchestra, surrounded by the chorus, which performs the third *stasimon* (975–1034) in anguished anticipation of what lies ahead. The agonizing cries of the elders create a stark contrast to the silent figure of the captive girl, who is still inside the carriage without moving.

The end of the third *stasimon* (975–1034) ushers in an arresting scene (1035–1071). Clytemnestra emerges from the palace and unexpectedly addresses Cassandra, first in the second person and then by name: 1035 *εἴσω κομίζον καὶ σὺ, Κασ<σ>άνδραν λέγω*. She asks Cassandra to come out of the carriage and attributes the delay to the pride of Priam's daughter (1039 *ἐκβαίν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει*). As Cassandra continues to be silent, Clytemnestra offers a rationalistic explanation: because the girl is a barbarian, she cannot understand what she has been told (1050–1053).<sup>35</sup> The

33. By this I do not mean that the absence of reference to the *Prometheus Vincetus* from Aristophanes' criticism in the *Ranae* is intentional; for such an idea see Griffith (1977) 318 n. 65.

34. For Cassandra's silence, Taplin (1972) 77–78; Thalmann (1985) 228–229; Hourmouziades (1991) 198–201; Montiglio (2000) 213–216.

35. Rutheford (2012) 309; Goldhill (1986) 25.

chorus asks Cassandra to obey and follow the Queen leaving the carriage behind (1054–1055); not wishing to delay the rituals any further (1055–1056 *οὔτοι θυραίαν †τήνδ’† ἐμοὶ σχολὴ πάρα / τρέβειν ...*), the Queen orders the captive girl to use sign language with her hands if she still fails to understand (1060–1061 *εἰ δ’ ἀξυνήμων οὔσα μὴ δέχη λόγον, / σὺ δ’ ἀντὶ φωνῆς φράζε καρβάνω χειρὶ*). Cassandra’s long silence occurs in strong contrast to the welcoming of the victorious king; it functions as censure of everything that happened before as previously narrated by the chorus (681–809): the guilt-ridden campaign that began with the sacrifice of an innocent girl, death in battle, the sacking of Troy and captivity.

The following lyrics of the chorus and the Queen indicate that Cassandra is not silent anymore; however, instead of words, she utters incomprehensible sounds, which are compared by the chorus with the bellowings of a wild animal (1062–1063 *ἐρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἢ ξένη τοροῦ / δεῖσθαι τρόπος δὲ θηρὸς ὡς νεαιρέτων*) and attributed to the mania characteristic of barbarian arrogance (1064–1068). When Clytemnestra disappears inside the palace, the chorus describes Cassandra’s cries as an expression of distress over her captivity and express pity and willingness to help the girl exit the carriage (1069–1071). At this point, Cassandra is presented to the audience, and stands obviously on the orchestra. The extensive scene that follows (1072–1330) includes a lyric and an iambic section. In an ecstatic way (1072 *δοτοτοτοτοῖ ποποῖ δᾶ· ὄπολλον ὄπολλον*), Cassandra foretells the murder of Agamemnon (1107–1111) and her own death (1136–1139) and predicts the renewal of evil in the house of the Atreidae after pointing out its sources (1214–1225). The “unfaithful” prophetess of Apollo (1203–1213) thus becomes a bearer of the Aeschylean belief regarding the inherited guilt of the Atreidae. Now her prophetic delirium, with which she breaks her silence, tears the victorious image of Agamemnon apart and confirms the premonition of evil –which had been present in the very beginning of the play<sup>36</sup> as something dramatically imminent. Following the end of the scene, Agamemnon’s two cries are enough to verify the prophecy and drive the plot towards the king’s death (1343 *ὦμοι, πέπληγμαὶ καιρίαν †πληγὴν ἔσω† ‘alas! I have been struck deep with a deadly blow’*; 1345 *ὦμοι, μάλ’ αἴθις, δευτέραν πεπληγμένος, ‘alas! I am struck once again, with a second blow’*).

36. See in the prologue of the *Agamemnon* the anxiety expressed by the Watchman (*Ag.* 18–19 *κλαίω τότ’ οἶκον τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων, / οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ’ ἄριστα διαπονουμένον, ‘then my tears begin, groaning for the misfortune of this house, which is no longer ordered best, as it used to be’*) and compare the chorus’ anxiety in his long *parodos* (40–263).

As regards the number of actors, we can easily see that the scene in the third episode of the *Agamemnon* is composed of three persons (Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Cassandra), and that the third person (Cassandra) remains silent; she becomes dramatically active in the following episode, where she breaks her silence after the two other persons have left. Thus, thanks to its completeness, the Cassandra scene confirms that the technique of Aeschylean silent characters lays the foundation for a third actor. Indeed, some years earlier Sophocles, Aeschylus' younger peer, had introduced the third actor according to Aristotle *Poetics* 1449<sup>a</sup>15–19, possibly in his *début* as a playwright (468 BC).<sup>37</sup> Still, scenes with three actors are found in the *Oresteia* trilogy. Particularly, in the fourth episode of the *Choephoroi*, the play following the *Agamemnon*, four persons are present on stage: a servant, Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Pylades who follows loyally Orestes everywhere. Of them, three persons (the servant, Clytemnestra, and Orestes) are active; Pylades remains silent until the moment he is heard reminding Orestes of the prediction given by the oracle at Delphi (900–901 *ποῦ δαὶ τὰ λοιπὰ Λοξίου μαντεύματα / τὰ πνθόχρηστα, πιστὰ τ' ἐδορκώματα*; 'what then will be the fate of Loxias' oracles delivered at Pytho, and of our oaths taken faithfully?'). It seems that Aeschylus here follows Sophocles in the number of actors and composes a scene of three speaking persons and one silent (Pylades). Pylades is almost always a silent character. Aeschylus exploits his silence and makes him a speaking character even for a while. After the breaking of Pylades' silence, his words sound like those of an oracle, heartening the distraught Orestes before he commits matricide. We might suppose that his voice is heard from the interior of the palace, which he may have entered previously together with Orestes for the murder of Aegisthus.<sup>38</sup> Aeschylus thus employed silence in order to compose scenes with a higher number of characters than the conventional *numerus clausus* of actors, even when the third actor had been introduced by his younger peer.<sup>39</sup>

A scene composed of four characters on stage is found in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, an undated play,<sup>40</sup> where the silent Iole, the captive girl whom

37. At the Great Dionysia of 468 BC, when Apsephion was archon; Sophocles, at the age of 28, won the first prize to the chagrin of Aeschylus (*Marm. Par.* 56; *Plut. Cim.* 8).

38. For the scene, see Tucker (1901) 6; Hourmouziades (1991) 212–213.

39. See Schlesinger (1930).

40. The date of the *Trachiniae* is unattested by external evidence; with internal criteria, the play may be placed in the 440's, although affinities with Euripides' *Hippolytus* or/and *Hercules Furens* cannot be excluded. For the problem, see Hoey (1979); Easterling (1982) 19–24.

Heracles brings with him in order to share his bed upon his return from a feat he carried out, might be considered a dramatic analogy of Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.<sup>41</sup> In Sophocles' play, the triumphant return of the husband is sealed by his death, which is caused by his legitimate wife, Deianeira, who unknowingly activates an old love potion containing the poisoned blood of the Centaur Nessus. This analogy is relevant to my subject, because Sophocles' Iole is a heroine who remains entirely silent throughout the play. During the extensive first episode of the *Trachiniae*, a messenger announces to the chorus the news of the unexpected return of Heracles (205–224), moving them to explosive joy. Then, a second messenger and not Heracles appears on stage (225–228), accompanying a group of captive women (241–245), among whom young Iole stands out (307). The poet does not name her but makes the persons of the scene pay attention to her. Deianeira notices the purity (308 *ἀνανδρος*, 309 *ἄπειρος*) and the gentle presence of the girl (309 *γενναία δέ τις*) and states that she is willing to soothe the sorrow caused by her captivity with *ἡδίστην* hospitality (329–331).<sup>42</sup> Only Lichas replies to the persistent questions of the Queen (307–308, 320–321) with deliberate ambiguity (314–315, 317, 322–328), whereas Iole remains silent.<sup>43</sup> She never breaks her silence and leaves together with the other captive women (and Lichas), never to appear again. However, Iole's character will prevail dramatically, causing the events to unfold.<sup>44</sup> When Deianeira learns the truth from the messenger (351–374), who observed the previous scene in silence (225–350),<sup>45</sup> she realizes that the young captive, whom she had treated with such sympathy, is an amorous rival (375–377). In desperation she resorts to Nessus' love potion in order to preserve Heracles' love, thus inadvertently causing his death. For the last time, the figure of the silent girl appears allusively in the brutal scene in the Exodus in which the dying Heracles experiences agony: suffering the paroxysms caused by the poisoned robe, Heracles asks his son Hyllus to marry Iole (1221–1229).<sup>46</sup> Despite the fact that she does not become a distinct dramatic character until the end of the play, Iole's presence and, especially, her recognition take on significance, inasmuch as she brings about a turn in

41. Mastronarde (1979) 76–77; Hourmouziades (1991) 202–205; Montiglio (2000) 190–191.

42. Text from Lloyd-Jones–Wilson (1990).

43. Montiglio (2000) 191.

44. Kitzinger (2012) 122–123.

45. Heiden (1989) 71–76.

46. Heiden (1989) 154.



the dramatic events. The cry of the chorus before the Nurse recounts Deianeira's suicide is characteristic: The silent bride Heracles brought with him has become a Fury in his house (893–895 *ἔτεκ' ἔτεκε μεγάλην / ἀνέορτος ἄδε νόμφα / δόμοισι τοῖσδ' Ἔρινόν*, 'this unmarried bride gave birth, yes she gave birth, to a great Fury in this house').<sup>47</sup>

Using Iole's silence, Sophocles composes a scene with four persons (Deianeira, Lichas, the Messenger, and Iole) in which both Iole and the Messenger remain silent throughout the dialogue between Deianeira and Lichas. During the dialogue, Deianeira does not manage to get information about the identity of the silent heroine; this will be revealed by the Messenger when he speaks after the departure of Iole and Lichas. The disclosure will set the events in motion. By means of Iole's silence, Sophocles keeps to the number of three actors he had introduced himself. In fact, Iole's silence is used by the third actor, the Messenger, when he reveals the identity of the silent heroine after she leaves the stage. However, the fact that the Messenger had remained silent himself for a long time is not commented on as in the case of the silent characters of Aeschylus. The Messenger's silence holds dramatic interest, but only as a method to promote the dramatic plot of the play.

In the prologue of the *Ajax*, rather the earliest of Sophocles' surviving tragedies,<sup>48</sup> the goddess Athena motivates the plot by ordering Odysseus to watch silently her mock at the illusions she had inspired in the title hero (87 *σίγα νυν ἔστὼς καὶ μὲν' ὡς κυρεῖς ἔχων*). When Ajax reenters his tent to start a new whipping his illusive victim, Odysseus, Athena calls Odysseus to recognize her power (118 *ὄρᾳς, Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχὸν ὄση*). Breaking his silence, Odysseus acknowledges divine omnipotence; but he expresses pity for Ajax and human weakness, despite his repulsion (121–126 *ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν / δύστηνον ἔμπας, ... ὄρῳ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν / εἶδωλ' ὄσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν*, 'but for this unfortunate one I still feel a pity ... because I see that we humans are nothing but phantoms or fleeting shadow').

In the *Antigone*, produced in 442/441 BC,<sup>49</sup> the silence of the title heroine expresses disregard for Creon's law and detachment of her imminent

47. Rutherford (2012) 148.

48. Sophocles' *Ajax* was probably performed in the 440s; see Finglass (2011).

49. This date is derived from the ancient *Hypothesis* of the play by Aristophanes of Byzantium, where the election of Sophocles as one of the ten generals in the Athenian war against the Samian revolt (441–439) is connected with the success of his *Antigone* (*φασὶ δὲ τὸν Σοφοκλέα ἠξιῶσθαι τῆς ἐν Σάμῳ στρατηγίας, εὐδοκίμησαντα ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῆς Ἀντιγόνης*).

punishment. After the second speech of the Guard narrating in details the arrest of Antigone, Creon addresses her with a sign of somatic language (441): *σὲ δῆ, σὲ τὴν νεύουσαν ἐς πέδον κάρα*. The fact that Antigone looked down toward the ground, probably from the beginning of the Guard's narrative, is a *deixis* of contempt for Creon and indifference to her arrest. Creon is likely to understand this; or he might have wanted to interpret it with his own criteria, possibly as an expression of shame by Antigone for her act. Of course, it was dramatically expected that Antigone would not speak during the narrative of the Guard. However, with Creon's reference to recognized somatics (looking down), Antigone's silence becomes significant just before she speaks; and this is what the poet calls the audience to pay attention to. In the third episode, towards the end of Creon's confrontation with both Antigone and her sister, Ismene, Antigone addresses Ismene with an 'encouragement' (559–560 *θάρσει. σὺ μὲν ζῆς, ἡ δ' ἐμὴ ψυχὴ πάλαι / τέθνηκεν, ὥστε τοῖς θανοῦσιν ὠφελεῖν*), and then remains silent.<sup>50</sup> Her silence is not remarked on by anyone on stage. However, it signifies the heroine's disdainful attitude towards Creon and indifference to Ismene's late willingness to help her.

Further evidence of manipulation of a character's silence can be detected in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, a late play (409 BC). In particular, it concerns the speechless situation of Achilles' young son, Neoptolemus, in the third episode. When Neoptolemus, now the owner of the bow of Philoctetes, regrets his deception of the unfortunate man and reveals to him that their real destination is Troy and not their homeland, Philoctetes reacts with a long speech in which he expresses rage and despair (927–962). Twice then during this speech Philoctetes charges Neoptolemus with his silence, without getting an answer from him (934–935 *ἀλλ' οὐδὲ προσφωνεῖ μ' ἔτι, / ἀλλ' ὡς μεθήσων μῆποθ', ὧδ' ὄρα πάλιν*, 'he doesn't speak to me anymore, but, as if he's not going to give it back, he looks away'; 951 *τί φῆς; σιωπᾶς*, 'so what do you say? you keep silent'). There is something similar in the *Oedipus Coloneus* towards the end of the play, where Polyneikes charges his father with his silence (1271–1274): *τί σιγᾶς; / φώνησον, ὦ πάτερ, τι / μὴ μ' ἀποστραφῆς. / οὐδ' ἀνταμείβη μ' οὐδέν; ἀλλ' ἀτιμάσας / πέμπεις ἄναυδος, οὐδ' ἄ μινίεις φράσας*; ('why are you silent? tell me, father, something; don't turn your head away. Don't you answer me anything? Will you dismiss me dishonored, without

50. Thus, it is not reasonable to attribute *Ant.* 572 *ὦ φίλαθ' Αἴμον, ὡς σ' ἀτιμάζει πατήρ* ('dearest Haimon, how much your father disrespects you') to Antigone instead of Ismene, in accordance with the Aldine edition of the text; see Mastronarde (1979) 95. Antigone here has no reason to make this apostrophe to Haimon because she does not mention him anywhere in the play; implicitly she denies his support through her silence.

uttering a word, without even telling me what is infuriating you?'). At the end of Philoctetes' speech, the chorus asks Neoptolemus what they should do (963 *τί δρῶμεν*); he replies that he has long since begun to feel great pity for Philoctetes (965–966 *ἐμοὶ μὲν οἴκτος δεινὸς ἐμπέπτωκέ τις / τοῦδ' ἀνδρὸς οὐ νῦν πρῶτον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλαι*) and does not know what to do (969 *οἴμοι, τί δράσω*; cf. 974 *τί δρῶμεν, ἄνδρες*). Neoptolemus' answer appears to break his silence. However, Neoptolemus' silence is not voluntary; he watches Philoctetes speak. On the other hand, Philoctetes' questions, which charge Neoptolemus with his silence, belong to the rhetoric of language used. Philoctetes in fact tries to detect the intentions of the young man and interpret his real condition. It is worth noticing that he uses a language of recognized somatic symptoms (the turning of eyes away) which are significant of embarrassment or/and disengagement. Thus, he understands with fear that Neoptolemus does not intend to give him back the bow. What's more, Neoptolemus' response to the chorus does not really break his silence because he does not clear up his position on giving back the bow. Unexpectedly, he expresses pity; and almost immediately he confirms his embarrassment for action, which was exactly what Philoctetes had previously suspected. A similar condition is found in the *Electra*, in the scene of recognition between the title heroine and Orestes (1126–1173), where Orestes, puzzled by the unexpected event, expresses inability to find words to speak (1174–1175 *φεῦ φεῦ, τί λέξω; ποῖ λόγων ἀμηχανῶν / ἔλθω; κρατεῖν γὰρ οὐκέτι γλώσσης σθένω*, 'alas, alas! what shall I say? to what words to turn in my embarrassment? I no longer have the strength to be the master of my tongue').

Neoptolemus' own growing feelings of pity are important, but not yet enough for him to make his decision about the bow of Philoctetes. In the next scene, the hero watches the confrontation between Philoctetes and Odysseus without uttering a word for about 100 lines (974–1071). His silence is not remarked on by anyone on stage.<sup>51</sup> Only at the end Philoctetes, who had earlier heard Neoptolemus express pity, addresses him with a question which in fact is a comment on his prolonged silence (1066–1067 *ῶ σπέρμ' Ἀχιλλέως, οὐδὲ σοῦ φωνῆς ἔτι / γενήσομαι προσφθεγκτός, ἀλλ' οὕτως ἄπει*; 'Seed of Achilles, will you no longer address me with your voice, but leave like that, without a word?'). At this crucial moment, when the audience is looking forward to Neoptolemus' answer but Odysseus forbids him to answer (1068 *χῶρει σύ· μὴ πρόσλευσσε*) and the chorus says that his captain is solely responsible to give an answer (1072–1073 *ᾗδ' ἔστιν ἡμῶν ναυκράτωρ*

51. Rutherford (2012) 334.

ὁ παῖς. ὅσ' ἂν / οἶτος λέγῃ σοι, ταῦτά σοι χῆμεῖς φάμεν), Neoptolemus heartlessly proclaims his compliance with Odysseus' wishes, which is alien to the pity he had previously expressed for Philoctetes (1074–1079 ἀκούσομαι μὲν ὡς ἔφην οἴκτου πλέως / πρὸς τοῦδ' ὅμως δὲ ... νῶ μὲν οἶν ὀρμώμεθον, 'I shall be told that I was full of pity for him, but still ... ; so, let us both go'). The actual breaking of Neoptolemus' silence will come shortly after, when he returns followed on foot by Odysseus. The young man's faint-hearted way to the ship with Odysseus has been halted by his decision to give the bow back to Philoctetes (1222–1262). As it seems, Sophocles manipulates Neoptolemus' silence as a means to present on stage the hero's perplexity and ethical judgement until his final decision. The hero's awkward silence expresses his inability to speak. When that is over, Neoptolemus breaks his silence by giving back the bow, an act by which he undoes his previous mistakes as he himself admits (1224 λύσων ὅσ' ἐξήμαρτον ἐν τῷ πρὶν χρόνῳ).<sup>52</sup>

A special case of a Sophoclean silent character would have been Philomela in the fragmentary tragedy *Tereus* (*TrGF* 4 F581–595b). According to the myth, Tereus raped Philomela, the sister of his wife, Procne, and then cut out her tongue so that she could not testify against him. Philomela however managed to expose Tereus' guilt and plotted with Procne against him with the murder of his son, Itys. Sophocles therefore might have manipulated a completely dumb character in a possibly active role in his *Tereus*.<sup>53</sup>

From Euripides' extant tragedies we find a case of effective silence in the beginning of the first episode of the *Hippolytus*, where Phaedra, Theseus' wife, who has fallen in love with her stepson, Hippolytus, enters the stage very sick (198), almost unable to walk and supported by her nurse. During their anapaestic exchange (198–249), Phaedra cries for her condition and the Nurse responds in anxiety. Then the Nurse engages in a dialogue with the chorus, where she recounts her past attempts of persuading her mistress to reveal the source of her disease but she always refused to answer. Phaedra herself watches silent and veiled (267–309). In this way, a double image of Phaedra's silence is created. One belongs to the prehistory of the play and is narrated by the Nurse. The second is Phaedra's on stage silence in the here and now of the performance: the heroine watches the Nurse speak until she hears the name of her beloved Hippolytus (310 310 [*Tr.*] Ἰππόλυτον ... Φα. οἶμοι. *Tr.* θιγγάνει σέθεν τόδε;). Phaedra immediately breaks her silence

52. For Neoptolemus' silences in the *Philoctetes*, Montiglio (2000) 247–248; Goldhill (2012) 43–47.

53. Hourmouziades (1991) 206–207.

and begs the Nurse not to say her stepson's name because that destroys her (311–312 ἀπόλεσάς με, μαῖα, καί σε πρὸς θεῶν / τοῦδ' ἀνδρὸς αἴθις λίσσομαι σιγᾶν πέρι). Phaedra's reaction will motivate the plot towards revealing her love for Hippolytus.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Hippolytus' obligation to be silent about Phaedra's love is not a speechless situation (601–668). Nor his claim that silence is useless in misfortune (911 σιγᾶς; σιωπῆς δ' οὐδὲν ἔργον ἐν κακοῖς) is relevant to the on-stage silence of a character. Hippolytus there, being himself innocent and ignorant of what had happened in secret, addresses his father, Theseus, from whom he tries to find out the reason of his anger (914–915 οὐ μὴν φίλους γε, καῖτι μᾶλλον ἢ φίλους, / κρύπτειν δίκαιον σάς, πάτερ, δυσπραξίας 'It is not right to hide your suffering from people who are not just your kin, but more than kin').<sup>55</sup>

In the opening scene of Euripides' *Orestes* the title hero sleeps on a couch; his sister, Electra, sits behind him and speaks the prologue. The fact that the sleeping Orestes is visible on stage might be considered as a case of a character's long silence. Throughout the prologue Orestes lying asleep creates stark contrast to Electra recounting his terrible persecution by the Furies (34–45, 81–85). Then, at the beginning of the *parodos* the hero's relieving sleep is remarked by the members of the chorus who enter the orchestra urging themselves to keep their steps quiet (140–141 σῖγα σῖγα, λεπτόν ἔχνος ἀρβύλας / τίθει, μὴ κτύπει) whilst Electra asks them to go away from his bed (142 ἀπροπρὸ βᾶτ' ἐκεῖσ' ἀπροπρὸ μοι κοίτας) and sing low-voiced lyrics (145–146 ᾄ ᾄ σύριγγος ὅπως πνοὰ / λεπτοῦ δόνακος, ᾧ φίλα, φώνει μοι).<sup>56</sup> Thus, when Orestes wakes up and invokes his balmy *hypnos* at the beginning of the first episode (211 ᾧ φίλον ὕπνου θέληγτρον, ἐπίκουρον νόσου), his voice signals the starting point of his on stage actions after his previous speechless situation.<sup>57</sup> Other silences in Euripides' plays (as in *Or.* 1177, *Suφφ.* 734, and *El.* 647) concern the manipulation of the plot, and they are not remarked.<sup>58</sup>

54. See Kim (2008) 136. I don't agree with Griffith (2013) 123–124, who juxtaposes Phaedra's silence in Eur. *Hipp.* 911 to the Aristophanic parody of Aeschylus' silences, which he considers to be "a gross exaggeration." For the interplay of speech and silence in the *Hippolytus*, Knox (1952); Goldhill (1986) 125–126.

55. See Kim (2008) 115 n. 6.

56. See Kim (2008) 121.

57. On the probable exchange between speech and silence in lines 1591–1592, Davies (1999). Orestes' silence in the prologue might be paralleled to the prologue scene of Sophocle's *Ajax*; see Griffith (1977) 117. But in that play the title hero is not visible on stage during the dialogue between Athena and Odysseus; and when he is called on stage, the silent person is Odysseus, as explained above.

58. See Rutherford (2012) 16.

Scenic and dramatic management of a hero's silence is found only at the end of the *Alcestis* (1008–1158).<sup>59</sup> But the fact that the play was performed in lieu of a satyr drama is crucial to the management of silence by Euripides. The silent character is the resurrected Alcestis who is retrieved by Heracles after fighting with the Death and returned to her husband, Admetus, who thinks that she is dead. In this case, Euripides composes a playful scene, which is in line with the light spirit of satyr plays. The tragedian in fact conceals the identity of Alcestis by having her face covered and organizes a scene of deception. Accordingly Heracles mock the sorrow-ridden Admetus by misleading him about the identity of the woman he delivers to him, in order for Admetus to guard her in his palace. When Alcestis is recognized in the end, Heracles concludes the recognition scene with an additional instruction: Alcestis must remain silent for three days in keeping with the underworld ritual prescribed for the purification of the dead:

[9] Euripides *Alcestis* 1143–1146

ΑΔ. τί γάρ ποθ' ἦδ' ἀναυδος ἔστηκεν γυνή;  
 ΗΡ. οὐπω θέμις σοι τῆσδε προσφωνημάτων  
 κλύειν, πρὶν ἂν θεοῖσι τοῖσι νερτέροις  
 ἀφαγνίσηται καὶ τρίτον μόλη φάος.

AD. Ah. But why is Alcestis so still? Why can't she speak?

HER. Until three days have passed, and the bitter stain of death has disappeared, she is forbidden to speak.<sup>60</sup>

Heracles' instruction to Admetus is in fact a rational comment on the silence of the resurrected heroine, which however acquires levity in harmony with the comic tone of the final scene of the play.

In conclusion: Aristophanes' parody in the *Ranae* 907–933 is decisive. Silence on tragic stage is a technique particular to Aeschylus, who creates strong dramatic effect with silent persons. Spectators would have found the silent heroes of Aeschylus provocative because this silence was not a moment of inaction and passivity but an instrument of reaction by which they expressed their tragic condition. Aeschylus paved the way for the

59. Hourmouziades (1991) 207–211.

60. Text from Diggle (1984); transl. by Arrowsmith in Burian–Shapiro (2011).

introduction of the third actor through this technique, by producing effective dramatic scenes with two speaking actors and a silent one.

Apart from Iole's exceptional silence in the *Trachiniae*, silent tragic characters (such as those of Aeschylus) do not appear in the plays of Sophocles (who introduced the third actor) and do not exist in the plays of Euripides (who in the *Ranae* accuses Aeschylus of deceiving the audience). Both Sophocles and Euripides seem to be conscious of the dramatic and scenic effects of Aeschylus' technique and manipulate silence to express tragic meaning, to interpret feelings of their characters, to underline dramatic intensity and to handle the plot of their plays. Sophocles prefers exploitation of the vocabulary of silence. Euripides' silent Alcestis is only an image that occurs at the light-hearted end of the same-titled play; but this tragedy was performed in the place of a satyr drama.

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