

Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and the Hidden Structure of Lessing's *Laokoon*: The Moral Aesthetic of the Scream

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Gothold Ephraim Lessing's *Laokoon, oder Ueber die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) is famous for its incisive distinction between the visual and poetic arts. For generations, students have memorized Lessing's lucid explanation: painting depicts bodies and hence is a matter of extension in space while poetry represents actions and thus must unfold in time, as explained cogently in chapter XVI. Those who venture further into the *Laokoon* soon lose the thread of this clear distinction and find themselves puzzled by obscure tangents, vehement polemics, and indulgent digressions. Scholars such as David Welbery and Carol Jacobs have long tried to make sense of the bewildering organization of Lessing's work. This essay builds on the work of these and others, but follows a different hermeneutical clue. It traces the appearances of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* in the text, and claims that the performance of this tragedy reveals an organizing dramatic structure to the text as a whole.¹ The drama of *Philoctetes* is reenacted in the serpentine lines of Lessing's argument, which is cut off with a necessary if anti-climactic *deus ex machina*. The theoretical achievement of the *Laokoon* is both amplified and undermined in illuminating ways by the figure of the snakebit archer.

Philoctetes's presence does not merely suggest an underlying structural dynamic to Lessing's treatise. It also makes clear the hidden ethical claim of the text.² *Laokoon* has most often been read solely as a contribution to aesthetic, semiotic, or antiquarian debates, but the intertextual drama with Sophocles's tragedy reveals a central moral commitment.³ It turns out that Lessing's fine distinctions between linguistic and visual representation are inextricably involved in our most important ethical obligations to one another as humans. Lessing seems to derive his »laws« of beauty from purely formal considerations, but these rules rest on a more fundamental, though never explicitly articulated, performative moral linked to Philoctetes's incorporation into the text. The stakes of this argument are not limited to the limits of poetry and art, but rather speak to the most basic responsibilities of human interaction.

This essay argues for the centrality of *Philoctetes* for both the formal structure and the theoretical contentions of Lessing's text. After briefly recalling the dramatic structure of Sophocles's tragedy, it becomes possible to trace the dynamic of Philoctetes's appearances in the initial four chapters of the *Laokoon*. The four patterns documented in these passages on

Philoctetes are mirrored in the construction of the fourth chapter, and then again in the organization of the entire *Laokoon*. In conclusion, though the treatise seems to end with an abrupt impasse, I claim that Sophocles's dance in *Laokoon*'s final footnote is both a coda and a productive if dissonant resolution to the intractable paradoxes Lessing's text has been teasing apart. The author of *Philoctetes* himself appears as a *deus ex machina* to save the *Laokoon* from suffering the fate of its namesake: being torn apart limb from limb by writhing, serpentine contradictions.

Sophocles's Philoctetes

Philoctetes was an archer among the Greek warriors headed for Troy when a snake bit his foot. The wound festered and refused to heal. Philoctetes's cries of anguish were so loud and the stench of his rotting flesh so foul that his disgusted comrades were hindered from the performance of religious rites. The Greeks abandoned Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos and forgot about him. Nine years later, after Hector, Achilles, and Ajax have all died and the war drags on with no end in sight, an oracle prophesied that Troy would only fall with the help of Philoctetes and his bow, which had been a gift from Heracles. All three great Attic tragedians wrote a *Philoctetes* tragedy in which Odysseus must bring the bitter archer back to Troy. In Sophocles's version, the only complete one to survive, Odysseus brings Achilles's son Neoptolemus along and convinces the young hero to trick Philoctetes into giving him the bow. The plan backfires when Neoptolemus is so moved with pity for the suffering Philoctetes that he renounces deception, returns the bow, and determines to be an honest hero. To judge from Lessing's detailed summary of the play, one would assume that the tragedy ends at this point — a detail that will prove decisive to my reading of the *Laokoon* — but Sophocles's drama is far from over. No amount of persuasion or promise of a cure can convince Philoctetes to join the Greeks, and only the *deus ex machina* of Heracles's appearance finally resolves the stand-off.

There are two contradictory ways to read Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. A common interpretation of the play involves a story of Neoptolemus coming to know himself and his true heroic nature of honest straightforwardness by means of his compassion for the noble, suffering Philoctetes. In this reading, Neoptolemus's pity for Philoctetes is instrumental in the moral education of the hero. Humanism triumphs.⁴ But another interpretation also suggests itself. The very fact that the play has to end in a *deus ex machina* shows the limits of rational discourse and human sentiment. Unlike Achilles with Priam in the final book of the *Iliad*, Philoctetes refuses to let his anger for his enemy be converted into pity. As soon as he gets the bow back, Philoctetes tries to shoot Odysseus and Neoptolemus is unable to persuade

Philoctetes to rejoin the Greeks. In fact, the old man manages to convince Neoptolemus to accompany him in desertion and betrayal. Without the divine appearance of Heracles, the play would have ended in abject failure: all of Neoptolemus's newfound heroic virtue is no match for Philoctetes's hatred.

One of the great strengths of Sophocles's play is that it allows for both the triumphant humanist reading of the power of pity and the sober reflection on the limits of human agency, virtue, and rational discourse. Lessing, like other influential eighteenth-century interpreters of *Philoctetes* seems to plump for the former reading in which pity is an unalloyed force for virtue and edification. Yet instead of doing so by attempting to erase the limits of rationality, by making language and persuasion work again with no uncomfortable remainder, Lessing emphasizes the limits of rational discourse — by reveling in Philoctetes's screams in which articulation and the entire system of language break down.

The Dramatic Structure of Laokoon 1-4

The main business of the *Laokoon* according to its subtitle and introduction is to elucidate the limits between the visual and poetic arts. Lessing has two handy exempla to guide this study: the eponymous statuery group of the Trojan priest with his sons, and the narrative description of the same scene from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Why is Virgil's Laocoon allowed to scream and wail while the sculptor's Laocoon can get away with a sigh? Yet throughout the first books of Lessing's *Laokoon*, Philoctetes upstages the title character. One tends to forget that though the essay is launched as a polemic against Winckelmann, Lessing does not in fact disagree with the art critic's claims about the Laocoon statue. Instead, it is an offhand remark about Philoctetes to which he dedicates his very first scathing criticisms. Philoctetes is absolutely crucial not only to the beginning of the text, but he holds together and organizes the treatise as modeled in the first four chapters.

In the first chapter, Philoctetes establishes the naturalness of screaming, the untheatricality of stoicism, and the expressivity necessary for sympathy. This allows the second chapter to deduce beauty as a law of the visual arts — under the unspoken assumption that sympathy is the purpose of all the arts. This second chapter closes with Lessing imagining what a lost ancient sculpture of Philoctetes would have looked like. The third chapter follows up on this by proposing the pregnant moment for visual arts: an artist must choose precisely that frozen time-point to represent that will spur the greatest motion in the imagination of the viewer. The fourth chapter then caps all this off by admitting that dramas share properties of both visual and narrative art and engages in a long analysis of sympathy in Sophocles's

Philoctetes. The lame Greek archer thus motivates all the theoretical inquiries that propel the plot of these four chapters. This trajectory is reflected in the overall structure of the whole book, and it is instructive to examine each turn in detail.

Chapter One: »To Give Suffering Nature her due«

The first chapter takes the logical form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. Lessing introduces Winckelmann's explanation for the expression on the Laocoon statue's face and then proceeds to show all the ways this assumption would lead to contradictions. The final paragraph then demands »einen andern Grund« (*WB* 5/2: 22)⁵ for Laocoon's appearance. *Philoctetes* provides more grounds for Lessing's objections than any other single source. Philoctetes's appearances in this first chapter predetermine the course of the entire text, blur the clear lines of argumentation to come, and speak to issues that Lessing was later criticized for leaving out.

Like all Lessing's great works, the *Laocoon* thrives on polemics. The *Laocoon* opens with an extensive quotation from J. J. Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755). In this essay, the father of art history had coined the famous motto for a classicizing view of Greek antiquity: »edle Einfalt und stille Grösse.« But Lessing does not take issue with this sweeping judgment.⁶ In fact, he follows the long citation with an entire paragraph about all the points of agreement he has with Winckelmann. Everything the art critic says about the Laocoon statue finds Lessing's approval, except that »in dem Grunde, welchen Herr Winckelmann dieser Weisheit giebt [...] wage ich es, anderer Meinung zu sein« (*WB* 5/2: 18). Two things bother Lessing: »der mißbilligende Seitenblick« Winckelmann throws at Virgil, and the comparison with Philoctetes: »Von hier [Philoctet] will ich ausgehen, und meine Gedanken in eben der Ordnung niederschreiben, in welcher sie sich bey mir entwickelt« (*WB* 5/2: 18). This sentence divulges the organizing principle and *modus operandi* at work in the *Laocoon*. Lessing expressly makes Philoctetes the starting point for the entire treatise, which is set up from the beginning as a contest. Since he then claims that he will proceed by recording his thoughts just as they occur, the *agon* of the text is configured as a race course, albeit a meandering one. Though Philoctetes proves to be, quite literally, a stumbling block to the plans of Odysseus in the play, he is the starting block that allows *Laocoon* to take off. In Lessing's conceit of a stream-of-consciousness composition, it would not be fallacious to claim that Philoctetes is the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* organizing principle for the entire book.⁷

After establishing Philoctetes as the motivating inception of the study,

Lessing repeats a line from the Winckelmann quotation: »Laocoon leidet, wie des Sophokles Philoktet,« and then asks: »Wie leidet dieser?« (*WB* 5/2: 18) Lessing answers his own question with a long list of Philoctetes's sufferings: »Die Klagen, das Geschrei, die wilden Verwünschungen, mit welchen sein Schmerz das Lager erfülle, und alle Opfer, alle heilige Handlungen störte, erschollen nicht minder schrecklich durch das öde Eiland, und sie waren es, die ihn dahin verbannten« (*WB* 5/2: 18). This description is meant to set up the defense of expressive Greek sentimentalism against the barbaric Roman and modern suppression of feeling. Yet although Philoctetes certainly does moan and wail as drastically as Lessing makes out, his claim here also includes grounds for the opposite conclusion. If the Greeks were really as accepting of pathetic displays of voluble suffering as Lessing alleges, they would hardly have marooned poor Philoctetes on the desert island! The actual effect of the screams had been disgust and abandonment.

Lessing quickly suppresses the reaction that Philoctetes's cries evoke in the real world, but he plays up the Greeks' enthusiasm for beholding these screams in the theater. If archaic Greek tolerance for expressive pain is belied by the tragedy's mythic backstory, the representation of this vociferous sufferer will garner applause – and first prize – in Classical Athens. To crown his sensational tally of screams, Lessing continues, »Welche Töne des Unmuts, des Jammers, der Verzweiflung, von welchen auch der Dichter in der Nachahmung das Theater durchhallen ließ.« (*WB* 5/2: 18). Not only do Lessing's Greeks refuse to stifle their cries of pain, but they even weave screams into their dramatic art. Two points are important here: First, Lessing's elision of the real-world reactions in favor of theatrical art displaces morality from reality to its aesthetic representation. Lessing's seeming equivalence of the imitation (*Nachahmung*) of shrieks with the real thing appears to be in direct opposition to his later claims forbidding the representation of disgusting things as present (chapters 23-25). Second, even before he formally announces the two art forms, poetic and visual, the limits of which he aims to establish, Lessing is already introducing the limit case (*Grenzfall*) where the two overlap: the theater. It turns out that these two apparent transgressions are related.

A careful parsing of the two sentences reveals a spectrum of differentiation. Philoctetes's awful cries first fill up (*erfüllen*) the Greek camp, then they ring out (*erschallen*) on the unpopulated island, and finally they echo through (*durchhallen*) the theater. In the first place, unwilling auditors leave the wailer all alone. In the final case, an eager audience expressly gathers to listen to Philoctetes wail. Where the shrieking man was present as real, the effect was revulsion and the resulting action was the expulsion of the shrieker. Where an actor shrieked in imitation as part of a theatrical

performance, the effects were fear and pity, and the action (as Aristotle and Lessing would hope) may be catharsis in the auditors.⁸ With three successive verbs of what sounds can do in space, Lessing bridges the domains of painting (space) and poetry (time). The spectra implied in these early sentences – real and imitation; space and time; disgust and compassion – adumbrate Lessing's main theoretical distinctions in the rest of the *Laokoon*. Put them together and you have the axes of a three-dimensional graph onto which one can plot all the aesthetic claims Lessing will make in the text. The real/imitation axis, moreover, can be cast in today's terms of performativity/theatricality (expressiveness vs. expressiveness with an aesthetic frame), which will turn out to have decisive consequences.⁹

This historic account is set off from the rest of the paragraph by dashes – as if imitating the interruption of Philoctetes's cries into the dialogue of the play. It immediately succeeds Lessing's introduction of his divergent reading and is followed by a speculation about the length of the third act of the tragedy. This disquisition on details of Greek theatrical practice may seem like a digression, but it speaks directly to the issue of time implied by the previous succession of verbs. Lessing agrees with other critics¹⁰ that the ancients did not take pains to keep the acts of their plays similar in length. In the case of *Philoctetes*, however, he imagines that the performance time of the »third act« could well have equaled that of the other acts due to how long an actor would need to perform all the onomatopoeiac expressions of pain. To make the shorter text equal the other acts in duration, Lessing seems to think there will be a great deal of hamming it up with melismatic interludes of moaning and writhing in pain. As evidence, he points to »die ganzen Zeilen voller, πᾶσα, πᾶσα, aus welchen dieser Aufzug besteht« (*WB* 5/2: 19).

In fact, Lessing is wrong about the technical point he wants to make here: Greek tragedies were not divided into Acts and Scenes, which were entirely the imposition of modern editors. But the details of Lessing's remarks nevertheless provide a solution to both the moral and aesthetic conundrums introduced in the first half of the paragraph. The adjectives and nouns with which Lessing names Philoctetes's cries – »abgebrochen«; »Dehnungen und Absetzungen« (*WB* 5/2: 19) – accurately describe the prosody of Greek tragic verse. The cries of pain are metrically inflected with the same scansion as the dialogue in which they are embedded. Scholars have little idea about the details of performative practice on the Attic stage, but it is clear that the sounds alternately march or syncopate with the iambic trimeter of the surrounding stichomythia.¹¹ Even if the actor slows the tempo of his declamation or improvises additional utterances of pain at the places marked by »ᾶ ᾶ ᾶ ᾶ«, the textual representation of the cries of pain indicates that they bear the same time signature as the spoken words.¹²

Hence it becomes clear why Athenian audiences do not turn away from the wailing Philoctetes with the same disgust as their archaic ancestors: on stage, the actor sings his cries.

This metrical understanding of Philoctetes's cries problematizes the claim with which Lessing begins the very next paragraph: »Scheiten ist der natürliche Ausdruck körperlichen Schmerzes« (*WB* 5/2: 19). The Greek actor portraying Philoctetes can hardly be »natural« in his technically practiced and metrically inflected cries. Instead, this first paragraph of critical analysis in the book already sets up a parallel to what Lessing will later deduce as the reason for Laocoon's peaceful expression in the statuary group. Just as Laocoon must turn his distorted grimace to a sigh in sculpture, Philoctetes must intone his disturbing cries as music on the stage. As the law of beauty tempers screams in the visual arts (*WB* 5/2: 24), so must meter inflect wailing in the theater. The only way that Philoctetes can win sympathy for his injured foot is by expressing his pain in metrical feet.¹³ His lacerated limb causes repulsion in the real world, but when it dances to the rhythms of iambic feet, disgust turns to delight. The performativity of Philoctetes's screams must be given a theatrical frame to have any salient effect on on-lookers.

Herder criticized *Laokoon* for failing to account for music in its division of the arts,¹⁴ but this early paragraph already provides material for all the conclusions the later critic will make. Like visual images and in contrast to words in language, Philoctetes's cries are natural, not arbitrary signs (cf. *WB* 5/2: 123).¹⁵ Yet like language, in opposition to art, they unfold in time. Unlike linguistic signs, screams are inarticulate. Yet importantly, the meter articulates the sounds into discrete and recognizable rhythmic patterns. The articulation of inarticulate sound would be a perfect definition of music according to Herder's critique, and this formula is deducible directly from Lessing's claims here about the performance time of the »third act« of *Philoctetes*.

This first chapter ends with speculation about Sophocles's lost tragedy, *Laocoon*. Just as Lessing's comparison of the plastic and epic representations of the Trojan priest were determined by recourse to Philoctetes, the imagined dramatic representation is also upstaged by the wounded archer: »So viel bin ich versichert, daß er den Laokoon nicht stoischer als den Philoktet [...] wird geschildert haben« (*WB* 5/2: 21). Perhaps not, but Sophocles most certainly would not have allowed Laocoon to be attacked by sea snakes in the stage action. All such violence took place offstage in Greek theater. The moment of highest fright and suffering would have been narrated in a telioscopia or a messenger's report, much as Theseus learns of Hippolytus's similar fate after the raging bull emerges from the sea.¹⁶ The cries of Laocoon and his sons may well have been reported in this

account, but they would never have »resounded in the theater.« Although Lessing spends so much of this first chapter in the theater rather than with the sculpture or the epic, the theatrical production he imagines here would have lacked the very cries he wants us to hear.

It is appropriate that Lessing's major claim following this imagined drama is negative: »Alles Stoische ist untheatralisch« (WB 5/2: 21). The rhetorical force of this passage is to defend the expressivity of pain against its macho detractors, but the phrase itself speaks to the impossibility of enacting the scene of Laocoon's demise on stage: it is literally untheatrical. Lessing continues: »unser Mitleiden ist allezeit dem Leiden gleichmäßig, welches der interessierende Gegenstand äußert« (WB 5/2: 21). This claim of equivalence between the pity of the viewer and the voluble pain of the visible sufferer is mathematical in its force, but it will be rendered unlawful by Lessing's own legislation in the very next chapter:

*Chapters Two and Three: From »Law of Beauty«
to »Free Play of Imagination«*

The mystery left by the *reductio* conclusion of chapter one does not last long. Lessing quickly deduces the law of beauty to explain the sculpture's silencing of the narrated screams. Yet this law, which applies only to the visual arts, is itself derivative. Ostensibly, the »Endzweck der Künste [...] ist Vergnügen« (WB 5/2: 25). An even more fundamental basis for this pleasure is revealed a few pages later when Lessing comes to test it in a dramatic thought experiment. The decisive contrast of the *Laocoon*, I claim, is between compassion and disgust. In this core distinction, for which Philoctetes has prepared the way, an ethical criterion ultimately determines aesthetic categories.

Lessing applies the law of beauty for visual art to explain why the sculptor's Laocoon cannot wail like Virgil's. The artist had to turn screams into sighs, namely, »nicht weil das Schreien eine unedle Seele verrät, sondern weil es das Gesicht auf eine ekelhafte Weise verstellte« (WB 5/2: 29). *Ekel*, disgust, is what art must avoid. And now Lessing begins his thought experiment:

Denn man reiße dem Laocoon in Gedanken nur den Mund auf und urteile. Man lasse ihn schreien und sehe. Es war eine Bildung, die Mitleid einflößte, weil sie Schönheit und Schmerz zugleich zeigte; nun ist es eine häßliche, eine abscheuliche Bildung geworden, von der man gern sein Gesicht wendet, weil der Anblick des Schmerzes Unlust erregt, ohne daß die Schönheit des leidenden Gegenstande diese Unlust in das süße Gefühl des Mitleids verwandeln kann. (WB 5/2: 29)

This passage distills the effect of art into two fundamental, opposing movements: looking away and turning towards. It has been annoying to scholars that Lessing, for whom *Mitleid* (sympathy) was so important, never gave a precise definition of the term. Much has been written about whether Lessing's *Mitleid* means compassion or empathy in his theoretical works about art and the theater,¹⁷ but this moment in the *Laocoon* provides as clear an explanation as we ever get. Importantly, it is a purely phenomenological account of the subject's pivoting relation to the other: *Mitleid* makes you turn toward the other. Its opposite is *Ekel*, which makes you turn away.

This explanation is in accord with the social and political work of all of Lessing's theater, and also offers a grand-unifying theory of the arts here in the *Laocoon*. Martha Nussbaum has identified compassion and disgust as doing opposing work in fostering or hampering morality in civil society. Compassion can help form the eudaimonistic judgment that transforms emotion into political virtue. Disgust at other people's and culture's differences, in contrast, is an objectifying emotion that undermines that goal.¹⁸ The »law of beauty« is in the service of making people want to look toward others rather than turning them away. Hence the artist's mitigation of wrath into seriousness, anguish into sadness (WB 5/2: 27) and screams into sighs (WB 5/2: 29). The intensity of the former emotions would distort the face and make people look away. Their softening (*Milderung*) into the latter expressions invites an almost eroticizing fascination with pain meant to turn heads and fix gazes on the sufferer.

This sensual attraction to typically repulsive objects can also be heard in Philoctetes's echoes in this chapter. In an early digression, Lessing gets caught up in a fantasy of expectant mothers having erotic dreams about snakes. Not only, as Jacobs pointed out, are the Laocoon figures bound together by the lines of writhing sea serpents,¹⁹ but it was also a snake that caused Philoctetes's incurable injury. »Die Schlange war ein Zeichen der Gottheit.« Lessing insists as he claims to »save the dream from its dismissive detractors (WB 5/2: 25). The slithering reptiles, so often represented as disgusting or even evil in Western art, are here transformed into voluptuous, phallic gods. Lessing's final justification for his deification of the snakes is uncharacteristically, but hilariously, lame: »eine Ursache mußte es wohl haben, warum die ehebrecherische Phantastie nur immer eine Schlange war« (WB 5/2: 26). It is as if the gratuitousness of this obsession with serpentine titillation is announcing itself. Somehow these repellent snakes have slipped past the seemingly secure barrier of the »law of beauty« to germinate the fertile imaginations's »free play.«

Another law-breaking breach against beauty occurs at the exact transition between chapters two and three, and again Philoctetes is the cause of the infraction. While chapter one closes with speculation about a lost drama

of *Laocoon*, chapter two concludes with the invention of a lost sculpture of Philoctetes. The statue is cited as the final example in the chapter's long list of affects that must be toned down in their artistic representation. In the suffering Heracles by an unknown master, his »wild« screams become »finster« (*WB* 5/2: 30). As if on cue, Philoctetes follows his hero onto the stage: »Der Philoktet des Pythagoras Leontinus schien dem Betrachter seinen Schmerz mitzutheilen, welche Wirkung der geringste gräßliche Zug verhindert hätte« (*WB* 5/2: 30). Not only has the sculpture in question here not survived, but Lessing's source does not even identify the statue as representing Philoctetes. With zero philological or archeological evidence, Lessing has »emended« the Latin text of Pliny's *Natural History* to include the Greek hero. Lessing brags about this rather brazen textual intervention in the last two sentences of the chapter: »Man dürfte fragen, wober ich wisse, daß dieser Meister eine Bildsäule des Philoktet gemacht habe? Aus einer Stelle des Plinius, die meine Verbesserung nicht erwartet haben sollte, so offenbar verfälscht oder verstümmelt ist sie« (*WB* 5/2: 30). In the footnote, Lessing quotes the passage from Pliny: »While in Syracuse [he made] a lame man, the spectators of whom even feel the pain of his ulcer when they see it« (*WB* 5/2: 31n).²⁰ Lessing replaces the accusative object of the first clause, *claudicantem* (limping man), with *Philoctetem*. He does not offer any scholarly justification for this move other than the rhetorical exclamation, »Niemand hatte mehr Recht, wegen solchen Geschwieres bekannter zu sein als Philoktet« (*WB* 5/2: 31n). No modern editors follow Lessing's correction; in fact, the critical apparatus of current editions do not even note the word as problematic.²¹

But the cocky announcement of this dubious textual improvement draws attention away from the trouble that the example causes. The audacity of introducing Philoctetes to Pliny's description hides another detail: the sculpture's avoidance of »gräßliche« (disgusting) features. Pliny offers no description of the statue's appearance. Instead, he only writes about the effect that the figure has on spectators. In both counts of how the example has to function for Lessing's argument, therefore, he has cheated a bit: that the sculpture depicts the wounded Philoctetes and that it does so by softening the extreme expression of his suffering. What remains – the only detail that Lessing legitimately extracts from Pliny – works in radical opposition to Lessing's purported aim. The statue's beholders appear to feel the pain of its ulcers in their own limbs: the sculpture »schieen dem Betrachter seinen Schmerz mitzutheilen« (*WB* 5/2: 30). The direct transference of agony between bodies is very different from »das süße Gefühl des Mitleids« (*WB* 5/2: 29) which great art is intended to elicit. The distinction is crucial to Lessing's phenomenological ethics of art. This contrast is precisely the one between what psychologists today call empathy (feeling with

another's feelings, whether positive or negative) and »compassion« (feeling for another's undeserved misfortune).²² In pointedly displacing compassion with empathy in this manufactured sculpture of Philoctetes, Lessing's text demonstrates the ultimate instability between the two phenomena, which his own argument requires to be separate.

At stake is the etiology of Lessing's gestural aesthetics: turning away in disgust vs. turning toward in compassion. The textual performance of Lessing's examples, real and imagined, keeps violating that basic principle. The disgusting proves to have a powerful allure. Despite his expostulation to the contrary, Lessing has a hard time turning away from what is vile and repugnant. At every turn, Philoctetes's wound and the snake that inflicted it are putting pressure on the sore spots in Lessing's prescriptive theories.

Chapter Four: »Wholly Nature«

The fourth chapter of *Laocoon* features a long and involved interpretation of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*. The structure of this chapter is analogous to that of the *Laocoon* so far. Chapter four begins by explicitly bringing to center stage the major issues that had been determining the first three chapters from behind the scenes. Lessing briefly summarizes poetry's differences from the strictures of the visual arts with the example of Virgil's *Aeneid*: if the artist was correct to stifle Laocoon's screams, the poet Virgil was equally right to make him »raise up horrible cries to the heavens«²³ (cf. *WB* 5/2: 35). This comparison of boundaries brings Lessing quickly to the tricky question of drama, the art that straddles sculpture and poetry as it unfolds in both time and space: »Aber Virgil ist hier bloß ein erzählender Dichter. Wird in seiner Rechtfertigung auch der dramatische Dichter mit begriffen sein? Einen andern Eindruck macht die Erzählung von jemand's Geheul; einen andern dieses Geheul selbst« (*WB* 5/2: 36). This question makes explicit what was implied in Lessing's very first move in chapter one to begin his investigation by describing Philoctetes's theatrical cries. It is as if he is rebooting the entire treatise again, this time spelling out everything hinted at in the first three chapters. In the following sentences, he admits that »je näher der Schauspieler der Natur kommt,« in enacting the screams, »desto empfindlicher müssen unsere Augen und Ohren beleidigt werden« (*WB* 5/2: 36). Nature here, far from a Rousseauian Eden, is tantamount to repulsiveness, which would not only destroy the desired effect of compassion but drive people away in disgust.

The rest of the chapter consists of four extensive »Anmerkungen« about how Sophocles manages to get out of this quandary. Despite the elements of repugnance in the material, his »Genie« converts it into »eines von den Meisterstücken der Bühne« (*WB* 5/2: 37). Strikingly, each of Lessing's four

numbered sections reprises the themes of the first four chapters in new contexts that provide commentary on – while moving forward the dramatic development of – the treatise. Revolving nature is performative; to be pitted, Philoctetes must become theatrical.

The first point (*WB* 5/2: 37-38) stresses the importance of the externality of Philoctetes's wound. Chapter one insisted that people should express their pain rather than keeping it stoically bottled up inside, while this passage praises the visible and physical limp over an interior sickness, no matter how debilitating. In chapter one, stoicism was untheatrical; here, internal maladies are less theatrical than the wound. But the paradoxical problems of theatricality discussed above are compounded here: to be believable, the wound must be supernatural. Modern French versions of *Philoctetes* that dispense with the occult snakebite are »weit unwahrscheinlicher« than »das fabelhafte Wunderbare« of Sophocles's myth.

The second point (*WB* 5/2: 38-42) enumerates the many other evils with which Sophocles strategically furnishes Philoctetes. At the climax of chapter two, Lessing tips open Laocoon's mouth to imagine the effects; here he sets up a similar thought experiment. Imagine someone marooned on a desert island like Philoctetes, but »man gebe ihm aber Gesundheit, und Kräfte, und Industrie, und es ist ein Robinson Crusoe« (*WB* 5/2: 39). Both experiments result in a failure of compassion: the screaming Laocoon evokes disgust, the opposite of pity in Lessing's gestural geometry; while the resourceful Crusoe wins our admiration, which is the opposite of pity along a very different axis.²⁴ If sympathy makes us look toward and disgust away from the other, admiration causes us to look up to her. Whereas chapter two codified the law of beauty and then violated it with an invented ancient statue of Philoctetes, this section also problematizes the neat graph of otherness. Heap all the ills together on one figure, Lessing claims, and the wretch will arouse »Schaudern und Entsetzen.« Fear, the inseparable partner of pity in Aristotle's *Poetics* had previously not made much of an appearance. Then Lessing introduces despair: »kein Mitleid ist stärker, keines zerschmelzet mehr die ganze Seele, als das, welches sich mit Vorstellungen der Verzweiflung mischet. Von dieser Art ist das Mitleid, welches wir für den Philoktet empfinden« (*WB* 5/2: 42). By now the spectators are looking down at the other. This new direction invites a critique of what is an invariable good for Lessing: there are elements of contemptuous condescension in pity. Moreover, though all the vectors of the gestural ethics are now complete (toward/away; up/down), viewers have been rendered impotent, with their useless molten souls, to offer any help.

The clear geometry of the second point, like the simple law of the second chapter, gets muddled and confused again in the following sections. The third note about *Philoctetes* (*WB* 5/2: 42-45) quotes a long passage from

Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that seems to be in accord with much of what Lessing himself has been saying so far, only to respond with caustic reproach: »Nichts ist betrüglichler als allgemeine Gesetze für unsere Empfindungen« (*WB* 5/2: 43). That is, of course, unless Lessing is the legislator.

The explicit naming of Smith in a polemic against him is surprising because, as Katherine Harloe has persuasively shown, Lessing's *Mitleid* shares many salient features with Smith's sympathy.²⁵ In the fourth part of chapter four (*WB* 5/2: 46-48), Lessing makes the most fundamental aspect of Smithian sympathy, its performative dynamic, the crowning point of his praise for *Philoctetes*. Smith constructs an anthropological account of human behavior that boils down to a theory of mutual performativity based on the desire to maximize the sympathy one wins from others. It is not just a matter of performing and interpreting performance, but a reflexive »habit [...] of considering how everything that concerns himself will appear to others.«²⁶ This mechanism fosters the development of an »ideal spectator« through a kind of second-order sympathy:

In the sentiment of approbation there are two things to be taken notice of; first, the sympathetic passion of the spectator; and, secondly, the emotion which arises from his observing the perfect coincidence between this sympathetic passion in himself, and the original passion in the person principally concerned. This last emotion, in which the sentiment of approbation properly consists, is always agreeable and delightful.²⁷

Hume characterizes this feature as »the Hinge of [Smith's] System.«²⁸ This doubling, second-order sympathy is a powerful new explanatory model for human behavior, performativity, and social harmony.

Though Lessing never explicitly cites this element of Smith's theory, it is clearly the theoretical lynchpin to his reading of *Philoctetes* in this last part of chapter four. Facing the wounded archer directly, spectators are made uncomfortable and put at a loss for how to behave: »Wie sollen sich also diejenigen verhalten, die mit dem schreienden Philoktet zu tun haben?« (*WB* 5/2: 46) This display would bring about the »widrigste Dissonanz« (*WB* 5/2: 46). Sophocles's solution to this problem is to put other spectators on the stage.²⁹ The audience beholds not only the expressive suffering of Philoctetes, but also the scene of sympathy performed between him and Neoptolemus: »der Zuschauer [gibt Ach!] auf die Veränderung [...], die in den Gesinnungen und Anschlägen durch das Mitleid [...] entsteht, oder einstreuen sollte« (*WB* 5/2: 46). In result, the audience is invited to a third-order reflection: not only do they see Neoptolemus feel compassion with Philoctetes's pain, but they also behold him reflecting on the effect

this sympathy has on himself. The young man describes this reaction as one of aporetic confusion: »a strange, terrible pity [ἰὸκρος δεινός] has fallen upon me!« (line 965). According to Smith, then, the external audience will sympathize with Neoptolemus's second-order sympathy both as a match of its distressful confusion and with an approving judgment of the harmony of this match. At this remove, the audience feeling with a character's feelings for another character's feelings, the compound compassion of *Philoctetes* is a dramatic laboratory in the psychology of sympathy.

Hence the rubric of performativity itself, so central to Smith's moral theory, has swooped in to provide the crowning tribute in Lessing's interpretation of Sophocles. The tragedy puts a purely performative scene (in the reality of the fictional world) on stage in a theatrical frame. But as in every previous point, he includes a flourish that invites a skeptical second look. In a moving passage, Lessing articulates this scene of sympathy in terms of nature and pretense: »Philoctet, seiner Schmerzen Meister, würde den Neoptolem bei seiner Verstellung erhalten haben. Philoctet, den sein Schmerz aller Verstellung unfähig macht, [...] Philoctet, der ganz Natur ist, bringt auch den Neoptolem zu seiner Natur wieder zurück« (*WB* 5/2: 45-46). After implicitly making use of Smith's system for his analysis of the play's effect, Lessing now violates the tenets of that system. As Lessing displayed in the opening pages of chapter one, Philoctetes's screams when overpowered by pain are in fact a tour-de-force of *Verstellung*. Not only are they performed with highly skilled histrionic art and inflected by metrical control, but they quite literally distort (*ver-stellen*) the natural features of the face. Neoptolemus's nature too is never a simple opposite of pretense. Both Odysseus's rhetoric in persuading him to depart from his nature to trick Philoctetes, and the old man's success in convincing him otherwise depend on making Neoptolemus think about how he will appear to others (cf. *Ins* 119; 1310-1314). The contraries of nature and dissimulation are entirely at odds with the performative calculus of Smith's sympathy: it is natural for humans to pretend. But in this passage, Philoctetes becomes »wholly nature: when the pain is so great that he blacks out and lies comatose. Lessing implies that only in the face of unconsciousness, beyond performance, can sympathy do its ethical, life-changing work.

In this vignette, the main point of the fourth part of the fourth chapter and of the entire treatise so far converge: this text that claims to be all about drawing clear boundaries is actually preoccupied with interesting, messy border zones: the theatrical stage where poetry becomes plastic art, nature meets artifice, compassion dances with disgust, and theatricality collapses into performativity.

The Dramatic Structure of the Laokoon

By repeating the general progression of the first four chapters in the four sections of the fourth, the text establishes a pattern:

1. Scream / Wound: A forceful and dense opening with all the future themes packed in hidden layers;
2. Clarity: a simple, over-determining formula that makes crystal clear sense (but ending with a hint of the formula's failure); clarified by compassion;
3. Complexities (*Verwicklungen*): lost clarity; »prägnanter Augenblick« leading toward or away from climax or catastrophe; fertile through disgust;
4. Theatrical Resolution: an embrace of the unsublimatable differences in a performative frame; second-order observation.

This pattern is marked in *Laokoon* by the textual traces of *Philoctetes*, and it matches up with the dynamic of Sophocles's tragedy:

1. Scream / Wound: Neoptolemus is thrust into his deceptive role by Odysseus and then confronts the wounded Philoctetes (lines 1-826);
2. Clarity: The experience of compassion brings Neoptolemus to the moral choice to tell the truth and return the bow (lines 827-1262);
3. Complexities: Philoctetes's trauma prevents him from complying with Neoptolemus's reasonable urging to rejoin the Greeks; an excess of pity leads toward betrayal and disaster (lines 1263-1408);
4. Theatrical Resolution: Only a theatrical device, the *deus ex machina* of Heracles's appearance, can force a peaceful ending that still does not erase the underlying trauma (lines 1409-1471).

With the comparison of the structural framework of *Laokoon* 1-4 alongside that of *Philoctetes*, a glaring question comes to light: in Lessing's extensive reading of the tragedy, why does he never address the ending? Lessing's analysis of the play ends at Neoptolemus's decision to return the bow, which brings him only to the second part of the rubric above. What about Neoptolemus's subsequent persuasion by Philoctetes to abandon and betray the Greeks? What about the god in the machine without whom the tragedy would have a much more »tragic« ending?

In fact, although Lessing never explicitly alludes to the remainder of the tragedy, he weaves it into the structure of the treatise as a whole. The first four chapters together, with their dense evocation of all the important issues to be worried over in the book, correspond to the first »Scream / Wound« opening episode. »Clarity« is achieved in the »dry chain of conclusions« (*WB* 5/2: 117) of the famous chapter sixteen. Directly afterwards, however, »Complexities« again begin to cloud the clear view from the deductive height of reasoning, as Lessing involves himself in ever more arcane and obscure debates. They reach their most opaque in a run of three chapters dealing with the niceties of disgust (XXIII-XXV). In the final footnote and

hence the very last page of the entire volume, however, Sophocles makes an appearance that brings all the disparate threads of the book's many concerns together in one dynamic image of Theatrical Resolution (XXIX). These last two movements are marked by the reappearance of *Philoctetes* and its author:

1. Scream/Wound: Chapters I-IV
2. Clarity: Chapter XVI
3. Complexities: Chapter XXV
4. Theatrical Resolution: Chapter XXIX

By chapter twenty-five, readers have been slogging their way through many pages of fine distinctions about, and examples of, the ugly and the disgusting. For all Lessing's praise of the ancients for their adherence to the law of beauty and admonition of the modern taste for the grotesque, he seems strikingly obsessed with the hideous himself. Scholars have made much of this apparent contradiction, and proposed various solutions to or deconstructions of it.³⁰ Here I would like to suggest a dramatic trajectory, modeled on Neoptolemus's path, as a way of thinking about the *Ekelstuch*. After his pity for Philoctetes leads to a moment of moral clarity in returning the bow, Neoptolemus tries to convince the older man to rejoin the Greeks and receive the cure for his wound at the Trojan camp. Instead, it is Neoptolemus who is slowly persuaded to betray his countrymen and flee away with Philoctetes. The salutary effect of sympathy devolves, from a conventional Greek point of view at least, into desertion and dereliction of duty. Similarly Lessing's text, after the brief clear vista of sharp distinctions in chapter 16, has lost its way in compulsive and combative digressions. The moral foundation of these aesthetic conclusions, as shown above, was an affective register of turning toward/away. The imperative for other-directed compassion, which justified the »law of beauty« has now been overstepped into its opposite; but instead of diving away Lessing's glance, the ugliness now compels it.

Shortly before this move toward the repulsive reaches its climax, Lessing quotes for the last time from *Philoctetes*: It is an early scene of teichoscopia when Neoptolemus is describing the sight of Philoctetes's cave dwelling: »Wie vollendet der Dichter dieses traurige fürchterliche Gemälde? Mit einem Zusatz von Ekel. Ha! fährt Neoptolem auf einmal zusammen, hier trocken zerissene Lappen, voll Blut und Eiter!« (WB 5/2: 177) The play makes a reappearance here to mark a »fruitful moment« on the upward curve of revulsion. Lessing even tags the quoted scene as a *Gemälde*, for which he himself had specifically legislated the fruitful moment in chapter 3. It certainly serves to give free play to Lessing's imagination, as he continues to follow it up with more and more disgusting examples, culminating in a gratuitously long citation from another play about castaways on a des-

ert island who trade raunchy jokes about cannibalism (WB 5/2: 180-182). Although this picture gleefully breaks the law of beauty and wallows in its opposite, far from being repelled, Lessing cannot take his eyes away.

Even the elaborately staged return of Winckelmann in chapter twenty-six does not dispel the digressive disorientation. After the initial excitement, Lessing changes tack to relatively trivial questions of comparative dating that trail off in the final pages to a petty list of corrections of Winckelmann's tome. Winckelmann was the initial sparring partner whose offhand remark about *Philoctetes* got the whole ball of Lessing's text rolling, but he is not the god who can set things straight again. For that we have to wait for the very last entry of mistakes Lessing identifies.

The long footnote that extends beyond the end of the entire treatise also begins unpromisingly as another detailed commentary on an error in Winckelmann's dating of *Antigone*, but then Lessing is reminded of another inaccuracy in Winckelmann's first essay that had set the textual thought process of the entire *Laokoon* in motion (WB 5/2: 205). There, Winckelmann attested that Sophocles as a youth had danced nude on the stage. Lessing demurs: Sophocles was never naked in the theater, but he did dance around the trophies on the island of Salamis after Athens's naval victory there in 480 BCE (whether nude or clothed, he admits, is contested; WB 5/2: 206). Then Lessing goes on to add one last detail:

Sophokles war nemlich unter den Knaben, die man nach Salamis in Sischertheit gebracht hatte; und hier auf dieser Insel war es, wo es damals der tragischen Muse, alle ihre drei Lieblinge, in einer vorbildenden Gradation zu versammeln beliebte. Der kühne Aeschylus half siegen; der blühende Sophokles tanzte um die Tropäen, und Euripides ward an eben dem Tage des Sieges, auf eben der glücklichen Insel geboren. (WB 5/2: 206)

In this remarkable triptych, the divine muse ties together the myriad theatrical strands of *Laokoon* into one suggestive image. The goddess has descended from the stage machinery in the last sentences of the last footnote on the last page of the last chapter. Taking the place of Heracles, the *deus ex machina* of this treatise is the muse of tragedy, *Melpomene*, literally »the singing one,« who was originally the muse of the chorus. The divinity of the *Laokoon* hence brings together in one figure music, dance, and theater. Significantly, the presiding divinity of this text about distinction is not one of either painting or of epic poetry, but rather theater, the artform where the visual meets the narrative in an inextricable blend.

The three scenes that the muse gathers – of war, dance, and birth – represent the cycles of human life and are moreover reminiscent of the depictions on the Shield of Achilles, which itself features prominently in

the *Laokoon* as a locus for drawing divisions between art and poetry. Lessing spends a lot of time and energy comparing the ekphrastic descriptions of Achilles's shield in Homer and of Aeneas's in Virgil to assign the proper province of poetry to the representation of actions rather than of objects (XVIII–XIX). By reprising this comparison with the tableau of the three tragedians in one image at three symbolically important stages of life, the goddess of the text further conflates the domains that the treatise purports to distinguish. Hence, like the divine intervention at the end of *Philoctetes*, the final gesture of the *Laokoon* presents an interpretive equivocation. In the tragedy, Heracles's intercession preserves mythic necessity from the consequences of incurable trauma; in the treatise, the muse's final sentence secures a productive realm of indeterminacy (*ápeiron*) threatened by strict prescriptive divisions.

Melpomenē's *deus ex machina* showcases very clearly, however, the vital but complex role that aesthetics plays in human morality. Neither the face-distorting pains of a mother's labor nor the gore and horrors of naval battle were permissible on ancient or neo-classical stages; the moral geometry implicit in the law of beauty would make spectators turn away in disgust at these sights rather than reach out toward the suffering other. Center-stage between life's limits of natality and mortality, however, the youth's dance mediates between birth and death, and draws onlookers' eyes with its beautiful movements. Performative dance becomes a medium of ethical concern. Just as music can be understood as the articulation of inarticulate sound, dance is an arrangement of corporeal motion in rhythmic steps with no destination. The grace of dancing bodies attracts where birth pangs and battle deaths repel: the law of beauty has a basis in morality.

Yet the question of Sophocles's nudity, which motivates Lessing's invocation of the goddess here in the first place, and which Lessing slyly leaves veiled in unanswerable obscurity, amplifies the pointed historicity — and hence ultimate lawlessness — of beauty. The adolescent's naked form (Sophocles would have been sixteen in 480 BCE) was the pinnacle of aesthetic perfection in Attic culture, a sight that attracted spectators daily to the gymnasium of Athens. But in the post-Christian Europe for whom Lessing invites the muse to devise this triptych of birth, battle, and boogie, the spectacle of a nude boy is scandalous, even illegal. Yet Lessing shares Winckelmann's fascination with the image of Sophocles's naked gyrations; the aestheticizing motions of the youth's dance compel prurient, shameful gazes. Disgust and beauty are not the pure opposites they seem in chapter II's clear articulation of the moral aesthetic (*WZB* s/2: 29).

* * *

Reading *Laokoon* alongside *Philoctetes* hence opens up surprising perspectives on some of the most pressing questions of eighteenth-century ethics. The phenomenological distinction between sympathy and disgust provides an ethical geometry that points to performance as the medium of morality. Philoctetes is key to recognizing how Lessing's treatise on the limits of poetry and visual art really takes its impetus from a subterranean division between performativity and theatricality, an ongoing debate among today's performance scholars to which Lessing suggestively contributes.

In four movements from the wound to the god, with clarity and confusion in between, Sophocles's *Philoctetes* helps discern order in Lessing's *Laokoon*. This evidence of the inner coherence and careful architecture, however, does not make Lessing a liar when he declares its rambling method. The best imitation of natural thought must be artificial to the highest degree. Beautiful correspondences and striking organizing principles can sometimes be discovered in close attention to one's interior dialogue with the passing landscapes during a perambulation. And Lessing is never alone in the *Laokoon*. His text is designed not as a solitary walk but a wandering scrimmage or relay race with a series of sparring partners. The hidden structures behind the conversational flow of debate make this text similar to a Platonic dialogue. As in the *Phaedo*, for instance, the *Laokoon* features flawed arguments that spur productive lines of thought for readers; both texts are also studded with moments of revelatory clarity that get lost almost immediately in forgetful confusion. They thus mimic the lived experience of conversation and thinking, and perform the necessity of perplexity in the ongoing process of knowledge.

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1 Two recent contributions pay attention to the importance of Philoctetes in *Laokoon*: Ura Korzeniewski, »Sophokles! Die Alen! Philoktetes! Lessing und die antiken Dramatiker, Konstanz 2003; Katherine Harloe, *Sympathy, Tragedy, and the Morality of Sentiment in Lessing's Laokoon*, in: *Rethinking Lessing's Laokoon*, Oxford 2017, pp. 157–176. Korzeniewski includes a thorough if conventional summary of Lessing's interpretation of *Philoctetes* (pp. 506–539). Harloe draws out the importance of this interpretation for Lessing's theory of tragedy and thinking on sympathy. Neither explores the structural role of the drama for *Laokoon* as a whole nor looks to the intertextual engagement with Philoctetes beyond the fourth chapter of the text.

2 Frederick Beiser, in contrast, identifies the »hidden agenda« of the *Laokoon* as a defense of poetry against the primacy of art: *Diotima's Children: German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford 2009, pp. 277–282.

3 David Wellbery and Katherine Harloe are exceptions to this general trend. Both have recently made claims for the ethical implications of *Laokoon*. Wellbery

- began to rethink the semiotic and structuralist emphasis of his influential 1984 monograph in the 1990s: The Pathos of Theory: *Laocoon* Revisited, in: *Intertextuality: German Literature and Visual Art from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, Columbia, SC 1993, pp. 47-63. In his most recent contribution, Wellbery even claims that formal aesthetic issues may be «secondary» to the more fundamental issues of critical judgment: *Laocoon* Today: On the Conceptual Infrastructure, in: *Rethinking Lessing's Laocoon*, Oxford 2017, pp. 59-86. In the same volume, Katherine Harloe explicitly links Lessing's use of *Philoctetes* to his moral concerns: Harloe (note 1), p. 159. Neither of these «ethical turns» in *Laocoon* scholarship, however, argues for a performative phenomenology of morality, as this essay does.
- 4 For a modern version of this positive reading of compassion, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Morality of Pity*; Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, in: *Rethinking Tragedy*, ed. by Rita Felski, Baltimore 2008, pp. 148-169.
 - 5 All quotations are taken Lessing, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, ed. by Wilfried Barner, Frankfurt 1990, cited as *WB*, followed by volume and page numbers
 - 6 For a deconstruction of Winckelmann's idealization of Greek art, see Richard Block, *The Spell of Italy: Vacation, Magic, and the Attraction of Goethe*, Detroit 2006, pp. 17-48.
 - 7 Lessing's ostensible claims about his writing practice are demonstrably disingenuous. That does not mean they are necessarily false, however, as claims about the performance of the text. See Carol Jacobs, *The Critical Performance of Lessing's Laocoon*, in: *MLN*, vol. 102.3 (1987), pp. 483-521, here p. 488.
 - 8 For Lessing's interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis, see: *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Ein und achtzigstes Stück (*WB* 6: 585-590).
 - 9 »Performativität« and »theatralität« were certainly not terms deployed in the eighteenth century. The concepts behind them, however, were very much in play. In this article, I follow Fischer-Lichte's usage: Performance is the broader term: any activity done *for* or *beyond* others. Theatricality is the subset of performances undertaken in the context of an aesthetic frame (which will vary from culture to culture). See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotics of Theater*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones, Bloomington 1992, pp. 139-140, and: *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, trans. Minou Armojand, New York 2014, pp. 99-110.
 - 10 Namely Pierre Brumoy, the first translator of *Philoctetes* into a modern language (*WB* 5/2: 18).
 - 11 Philoctetes's cries of pain scan differently at different points. The »ἀτταραταί« and »ἀτατταταταί, πατατταταταττατατταταταί« (lms 743, 746; see also 754, 786) match the surrounding iambic trimeter perfectly. The »ἄ ἄ ἄ ἄ ἄ« (lms 733, 739; 782; 785; 790; 795) are shorter interjections between complete lines, technically extra metrum exclamations, but they can also scan as feet in iambic trimeter. For current scholarship on the meter of this section (lines 730-826: the second episode, or »act three« according to Brumoy), see the commentary in Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ed. by Seth Schein, Cambridge 2013, pp. 236-246.
 - 13 The prosody of Attic tragedy has its roots in the choral dance. The reason we refer to metrical units as »feet« is that they were measured out by the dancers'

- slapping of bare feet on stones. See A. David, *The Dance of the Muses: Choral Theory and Ancient Greek Poetics*, Oxford 2006.
- 14 Johan Gottfried Herder, *Kritische Wälder*, Erstes Wäldchen, in: *Werke in zehn Bänden*, vol. 2, ed. by Gunter E. Grimm, Frankfurt 1993, pp. 57-245.
 - 15 Yet even here the division is not completely distinct, as »arbitrary signs« insinuate themselves into these supposedly »most »natural« of signs. The sounds that Philoctetes screams (ατατταταταί, etc.) echo words for »daddy« (ταττατα) and »child« (παίς). See Schein's commentary, *Philoctetes*, p. 238.
 - 16 See Euripides, *Hippolytus*, lms 1153-1254.
 - 17 E.g., Thomas Martinec, *The Boundaries of Mitleidskannbarkeit: Some Clarifications Concerning Lessing's Concept of Mitleid*, in: *Modern Language Review*, vol. 101.3 (2009), pp. 743-758.
 - 18 See Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotion*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 320-321.
 - 19 Jacobs (note 7), p. 483.
 - 20 Cf. C. Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis historia*, ed. by L. Ian and C. Mayhoff, Stuttgart 1967, book 34, line 25.
 - 21 Plinius (note 20), p. 183.
 - 22 For a helpful discussion of the terminology of sympathy, see Nussbaum (note 18), pp. 301-304. For Lessing's *Mitleid*, see Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch*. Poetik des Mitleids von Lessing bis Büchner, München 1980. Thomas Martinec (note 17, pp. 746-747) makes a valiant and erudite attempt to determine when precisely *Mitleid* means empathy and when it means pity in Lessing's work, but I find his distinctions rather neat and rigid for Lessing's actual usage, even in the examples Martinec cites.
 - 23 Virgil, *Aeneid*, II.222, ed. by H. Fairclough, Cambridge, MA 1916, p. 330.
 - 24 These were the two major terms in Lessing and Mendelssohn's *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel* (1756-1757).
 - 25 She does not, however, mention Lessing's unattributed importation of Smith's performative dynamics of sympathy, which I emphasize here. Harloe (note 1), pp. 169-170.
 - 26 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Indianapolis 1982, p. 43. This is the anthropological motivation for mitigating the expression of suffering (e.g., screams to sighs) that Harloe correctly attributes to Smith.
 - 27 Smith (note 26), p. 46n.
 - 28 David Hume, Letter 36 to Adam Smith, 28 July 1759, quoted in Smith (note 26), p. 46n.
 - 29 Neoplatonism was not a character in the earlier *Philoctetes* tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides.
 - 30 See Winfried Menninghaus, *Ekel*. Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung, Frankfurt 1999, and Dorothea von Mücke, *The Powers of Horror and the Magic of Euphemism in Lessing's Laocoon and How the Ancients Represented Death*, in: *Body and Text in the Eighteenth Century*, Stanford 1994, pp. 163-180.

Lessing Yearbook/Jahrbuch LI, 2024

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