The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory

ISSN: 0016-8890 (Print) 1930-6962 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vger20

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To cite this article: Ellwood Wiggins (2020) Enduring Myth: The Survival of the Unfit in Sophocles, Heiner Müller, Ursula Krechel, and Hans Blumenberg, The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory, 95:2, 94-113, DOI: 10.1080/00168890.2020.1751041

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.2020.1751041

Published online: 08 Jun 2020.

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THE GERMANIC REVIEW: LITERATURE, CULTURE, THEORY
2020, VOL. 95, NO. 2, 94–113
https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.2020.1751041

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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Enduring Myth: The Survival of the Unfit in Sophocles, Heiner Müller, Ursula Krechel, and Hans Blumenberg

Ellwood Wiggins

Germanics, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

ABSTRACT

To endure and to survive appear as synonyms in dictionaries, but the fates of the two words in the popular imagination have taken opposite tracks. 'Endurance' has enjoyed literary cache and wide admiration since the Homeric epics. One of Odysseus' most common epithets in the *Odyssey* is *polutlās*, "much-enduring." Endurance points to a capacity to suffer hardship, and has been lauded as a heroic virtue in many cultures. This passive submission to suffering, however, has lost its luster in recent generations. Since Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in the eighteenth century, and since Darwin and Spencer in the late nineteenth, "survival" has slowly begun to supplant "endurance" as an admirable goal. In many biological and sociological works, as well as in popular culture, "to survive" implies an active, seeking will. I claim that the metaphor of survival has "re-occupied," to speak with Hans Blumenberg, the older role of endurance in a variety of modern discourses. My essay explores this shift by reading three stranded island narratives: Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (409 BCE), Heiner Müller's *Philoktet* (1964), and Ursula Krechel's *Stimmen aus dem harten Kern* (2005). The evidence of these texts allows me to interrogate Blumenberg's metaphor of survival in his claims about the work of and on myth. The language of survival, so pervasive in today's scientific, economic, and sociological discourses, was born out of the death and resurrection of earlier forms of passive perseverance.

KEYWORDS

Myth; reception; metaphorology; Philoctetes; Robinsonade

Myth is a matter of survival. For Hans Blumenberg, this is true both for the work *of* myth—its anthropological function in human life—and the work *on* myth—the actual retellings of story patterns as they are reinvented in succeeding generations. On the one hand, myths ameliorate the terrifying "absolutism of reality" and have been a survival mechanism since the advent of humanity (WM, 9-20; AM, 3-14).[1] On the other hand, only the stories that outlive others get to count as myths in the first place. Hence "survival" is a conceptual key for Blumenberg's understanding of both the form and function of myth, which he parses out in terms of evolution.[2] Myth and other

CONTACT Ellwood Wiggins wiggins1@uw.edu Germanics, University of Washington, Germanics, Box 353130, Seattle, WA 98195-3130, USA.

[1]Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). Cited parenthetically with reference to page numbers of the English translation (WM) and the German (AM), *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt/Main.: Suhrkamp, 1979/1984).

[2]The collection of essays published in memorial to Blumenberg after his death is titled "The Art of Survival," *Die Kunst des Überlebens: Nachdenken über Hans Blumenberg*, eds. Franz Josef Wetz and Hermann Timm (Franfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1999). Despite this apt title, the volume contains surprisingly little explicit analysis of survival and its arts in Blumenberg.

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technological innovations of culture remove humans from the force of natural selection. But the same move that protects humans from evolution introduces a kind of selection now within culture and history: the stories themselves live on only as long as they prove useful; otherwise they are forgotten and disappear. Blumenberg invokes the "survival of the fittest" for these "theories and technologies" (WM, 165; AM, 183).[3] Myth, ultimately, is a product of "Darwinism in the realm of words" (WM, 159; "Darwinismus der Verbalität" AM, 176). As Angus Nicholls writes, the analogy between natural and cultural selection is a "guiding metaphor" for Blumenberg's account of myths and their role in human life.[4]

Yet Blumenberg himself is the chief teacher of suspicion when it comes to the seemingly self-evident and universal analogies of conceptual metaphors. It is important to become aware of the historical contingency and logical implications of our metaphorical thinking.[5] The very mechanism by which Blumenberg urges us to understand the operation of myth, for instance, is a relatively recent conception. The emphasis on survival in evolutionary biology is a nineteenth-century innovation. It underpins the theory developed by several twentieth-century philosophical anthropologists that humans are *Mängelwesen* (creatures of deficiency) trying above all to survive.[6] Blumenberg's language of survival in the elaboration of his work on myth would not have been available to previous generations of scholars. To borrow another term from Blumenberg's arsenal of ideas, could survival be a case of a "re-occupation" (*Umbesetzung*)[7] from some other conceptual image in Western culture? What older phenomenon has survival come to replace, and what consequences does the transposition bring with it?

As an initial hypothesis in approaching the evidence of the mythic material, I speculate that the category of "survival" has largely reoccupied the semantic field once taken up by "endurance." To endure and to survive are synonyms in dictionaries, but the fates of the two words in the popular imagination have taken opposite tracks. Endurance enjoyed literary cache and wide admiration from the Homeric epics to the twentieth century. One of Odysseus' most common epithets is *πολύτλας*, much-enduring.[8] The chief virtues for generations of stoics from Roman antiquity to early modernity were *patientia* and *tolerantia*—the capacity to bear up under all life's pain and sorrow. William Faulkner closes his masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury* with the two-word sentence: "They endured."[9] Endurance points to an ability to suffer hardship, and until the past century, was lauded as a heroic virtue in many cultures. This passive

[3]In the German *Arbeit am Mythos*, Blumeberg writes this phrase in English, emphasizing its special nature in a way that is missed in translation.

[4]Angus Nicholls, *Myth and the Human Sciences: Hans Blumenberg's Theory of Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 173.

[5]See Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, in *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, Vol. 6 (1960), 5–142; *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[6]E.g., Helmuth Plessner, Arnold Gehlen. Nicholls offers a helpful account of Blumenberg's reception of evolutionary theory and philosophical anthropology (*Myth*, 108–121).

[7]Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp,1966), 75; *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985) 65.

[8]The formula *πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς*, "much-enduring godlike Odysseus," occurs 33 times in the *Odyssey*. By comparison, the famous epithet for Odysseus, *πολύτροπος*, "of many turns," occurs only twice. "Much-enduring" (*πολύτλας*) is so strongly associated with Odysseus that even the chorus in Sophocles' *Ajax* apply this epithet when they speak of Ajax's arch-enemy (ln. 955).

[9]Significantly it is Dilsey, the black matriarch of the Compson family servants, with all the trauma of slavery's legacy to bear, who records this final sentiment.

submission to suffering, however, has lost its luster in recent generations. Since Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in the eighteenth century, and since Darwin and Spencer in the nineteenth, "survival" has slowly begun to supplant "endurance" as an admirable goal. In many biological and sociological works, as well as in popular culture, "to survive" implies an active, seeking will. Survival requires alertness, intelligence, and agency. Although the modern hero, Ernest Shackleton, named his expeditionary ship *The Endurance*, he is chiefly admired for ensuring the survival of his crew.[10] If the quintessential classical virtue was "to endure," the ultimate anthem of life today is Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." Passive endurance is passé; the fit and the faddish survive.

To contrast the two concepts, consider the genre of "survival narratives." It would be a deplorable mistake to term stories that bear witness to atrocities such as rape, child abuse, or the holocaust "endurance narratives." These brutalities must not be framed as inevitable hardships that victims have born as marks of their patient virtue. Instead, they are heinous crimes that *should never have happened* to begin with. Lauding the "much enduring" victim of sexual abuse would imply advice for others to "put up with" similar treatment. Instead of emphasizing passive sufferance of misfortune, "survival narratives" confront the injustice of the inflicted trauma while preserving the agency of the individual sufferer.[11]

The etymology of the English words for *endure* and *survive* helps clarify the differences between these two overlapping conceptual fields. "Endure" comes via Old French from Latin *indurare,* "make hard," from *durus* "hard" (PIE root **deru-* "be firm, solid, steadfast"),[12] and is hence related to German *dauern*. The virtue of tough patience borrows its similes from rocks and iron. Endurers "bear," "suffer," "put up with," "go through," "undergo," or "withstand" difficulties, and are marked by the hardness that hardship bestows. "Survive" also comes via French from Latin *supervivere,* "live beyond, live longer than," (*super* + *vivere*).[13] From its very inception, survival is a matter of comparison: to live *longer* than others. It always requires death as a precondition for its measure: survivors are marked by the deaths of those they outlive. Survival's extremist metaphors are not stones and steel but animate creatures whose tenacity makes them live through the most devastating conditions: rats after a plague; cockroaches after nuclear annihilation; the lone gun-nut with his bunker of supplies and automatic weapons. Endurers grow hard like stone; survivalists creep out from under rocks like roaches.

The sense of survival in play here is more akin to the "American" than to the "European narrative" of survival as provocatively outlined by Arne Höcker in his contribution to this issue.[14] It is not a question of collective guilt, responsibility, and reparative justice in the face of global catastrophe (the European model), but rather of technological solutions that will allow *some* humans to live through the devastation (the American model). But this metaphoric of survival has become so pervasive in the

[10]In contrast to "much enduring" Odysseus, whose entire crew perished.

[11]Which is not to say that casting narratives of collective and individual trauma into the genre of "survival" does not introduce its own problematic logic. But this important question is beyond the scope of the present essay. See Arne Höcker's contribution in this issue: "'Everybody makes it until they don't': Survival as Metaphor," 114–127.

[12]"endure, v.". OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/62035?redirectedFrom=endure (accessed March 16, 2020).

[13]"survive, v.". OED Online. March 2020. Oxford University Press. https://www-oed-com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/195109?redirectedFrom=survive (accessed March 16, 2020).

[14]Höcker, "Survival as Metaphor," *The Germanic Review* 95 (2020): 119.

international discourses of natural science, Social Darwinism, and capitalist economics that I would venture to claim that modern culture—including even the elite intellectual *niveau* of Blumenberg's careful philology—has largely succumbed to American survivalism.

Because evolutionary survival is such a pervasive conceptual shorthand in Blumenberg's work, the stakes of its own historicity are quite high. Is one of the few stable positions of Blumenbergian relativism itself shaken by this move?[15] Can Blumenberg's truth claims about the work of myth survive the historization of the "guiding metaphor" for his *Work on Myth*? Blumenberg's prime example is Prometheus, a story about the origin of technology, which is well-suited to reveal the aspects of myth's ultimate contingency, historicism, and inaccessible meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) highlighted in his study, the largest chunks of which are devoted to rich readings of Prometheus narratives. But it leaves open and unplumbed the questions of survival that he hints at earlier in the tome. After naming "improbable survival" as the defining hallmark of myths, Blumenberg enquires into its cause.[16] He rejects Freudian deep psychology and Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms as explanations for myth's staying power. Cassirer and others, he claims, overlook the "agency of reception" in myth: how it has been "'optimized' by its mechanism of selection" (WM, 168; "Organ der Rezeption" AM, 186). How exactly does this "organ" of reception work to effect survival, and what is it precisely that survives? If the logic and jargon of *survival*, moreover, have come to re-occupy those of *endurance*, what happens when one recasts Blumenberg's *Work on Myth* with the older motif? How might endurance change the calculus of myth's forms and functions?

This essay will explore these questions by reading three versions of the Philoctetes myth: one from fifth-century Athens and two from twentieth- and twenty-first-century Germany (Heiner Müller's *Philoktet,* 1965; Ursula Krechel's *Stimmen aus dem harten Kern*, 2005). Unlike Prometheus, Philoctetes does not figure in an origin story, but rather a tale of survival. Marooned for ten years on a desert island with only his bow to keep him alive, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is the oldest *Robinsonade* of the Western tradition. In adaptations of this story, the work *on* myth takes as its material the work *of* myth: staying alive. It is hence an ideal laboratory to test hypotheses about both the form and function of mythic survival. This essay will first show that endurance, not survival, is a chief feature of Sophocles' play. Its language, however, offers a useful taxonomy of survival narratives and an ethics of endurance. The German texts, meanwhile, substitute survival for endurance and provide edifying complications of both the generic and ethical categories gleaned from Sophocles. These readings then prompt a return to Blumenberg in my conclusion. Despite important differences determined by widely diverging cultural and historical conditions between the reworkings of this myth, it turns out that *death* figures prominently as a means of life in all three. To survive, one must master the service of death.

A brief reminder of the basic plot: 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' cries of anguish and the stench of his lesion disturbed his comrades

[15]For Blumenberg's radical skepticism, see Eva Geulen, "Passion in Prose," *Telos* 158/Spring (2012): 8–20.
[16]"Was läßt überleben?" (AM, 167; WM, 151).

and hindered the performance of religious rites. The Greeks abandoned Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos and forgot about him. Ten years later, when an oracle prophesied that Troy would only fall with the help of Philoctetes and his bow, they were forced to think of him again. All three great Attic tragedians wrote a *Philoctetes* tragedy in which Odysseus must bring the bitter archer back to Troy. In Sophocles' version, the only complete one we have, Odysseus brings Achilles' 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. No amount of persuasion or promise of a cure can convince Philoctetes to join the Greeks, however, and only the *deus ex machina* of Heracles' appearance finally resolves the stand-off.

This plot is perfectly devised to test conceptions of survival not only because of the Robinsonade that precedes the action on stage. It is also a tale of war, the ultimate scene of human killing. All three versions examined here were composed during an extended conflict. Sophocles produced *Philoctetes* in the twenty-second year of the Peloponnesian War, a mere five years before Athens' defeat. Heiner Müller wrote *Philoktet* in 1964 at the height of the Cold War, while Ursula Krechel published *Stimmen aus dem harten Kern* in 2005, four years into the still ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and three years after the US invasion of Iraq. Philoctetes survives nine years of battling nature only to be forced to return to another year of war. Individual survival in a man-v.-nature narrative thus provides the backdrop to a story of returning to society, which in this case is simultaneously a return to man-v.-man violence. Both individual and social survival are at stake, and in fact are used to justify each other at every turn.

Philoctetes has to survive not only isolation and war, however. He is most significantly defined by his wound: a suppurating injury that lames and debilitates him with excruciating pain. Philoctetes is no strapping Robinson Crusoe proud of his conquering ingenuity, but rather a weak outcast suffering both physical handicap and mental trauma. Far from being a case of the survival of the fittest, each version of the story emphasizes the ways that his bodily and psychic wounds have made Philoctetes fundamentally unfit for life. Paradoxically, in each work—and in wildly different ways—it is precisely this unfitness that makes Philoctetes a cipher of survival. His closeness to death renders Philoctetes an "organ" (in Blumenberg's sense) of life.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

Philoctetes' experience as a lonely castaway is so ubiquitous in the myth's long and rich post-classical reception that it seems an indispensable element of the myth. Nearly every version of *Philoctetes* since antiquity has emphasized the character's isolation and struggles on a desert island. Yet this particular detail was one of the chief innovations in Sophocles' reworking of the myth for his tragedy. In Aeschylus' and Euripides' earlier plays, Philoctetes has also been abandoned on Lemnos, but in their dramas as in real life, the island was large and populated. By the time Sophocles staged *Philoctetes* in 409 BCE, Lemnos had been an Athenian possession for nearly one hundred years. The audience in Athens would have been surprised at the prosperous island's sudden

depopulation and barrenness. This shocking desolation serves to enhance Philoctetes' suffering for onlookers on stage and in the theater, but for modern readers it also places the play firmly if anachronistically into the tradition of the Robinsonade, with all its attendant expectations of realistic accounts of the hero's will to survive.[17]

Some tropes of the Robinsonade are diligently prefigured in Sophocles' play. In an early instance of teichoskopia, Neoptolemus describes in touching detail the cave where Philoctetes has been living, with its bed of leaves and roughhewn cup of wood, the "contrivance (*τεχνήματ'*) of a sorry workman" (35-6).[18] But these disparaging remarks are the last mention of Philoctetes' technical ingenuity or craftsmanship. Whereas we learn in painstaking specificity how Crusoe constructed his shelter and other useful devices, Philoctetes never shares any product of his own artifice.[19] Even the bow which provided him with sustenance was a gift of Heracles from long ago, not a contraption of his own design. Artifice and craft—human *technē*—are central to the rhetoric of survival, but they are largely absent from the language of endurance.[20]

Modern consumers of castaway fare will be surprised, especially considering the lengths to which Sophocles went to exterminate human life on Lemnos in order to maroon Philoctetes on an uninhabited isle, to find so little talk of survival. Ancient Greek verbs strictly for *to survive* (e.g., *περιγίγνομαι*, *ἐπιζάω*) are rare in classical texts, and never appear in this tragedy at all. Historians such as Herodotus, for instance, employ these words when one soldier remains alive after a battle after all the others are killed, but they seem not to be expressions that Attic poets or philosophers generally grasp for.[21] Survival is not in the metaphorical arsenal of the Ancient Greek lifeworld. Instead, words related to *endurance* are peppered throughout Sophocles' tragedy in reference to Philoctetes' continued existence on the island. The root of Philoctetes' chosen epithets for himself (*τλάμων*, *τάλας*), together repeated no fewer than 25 times, is *τλῆναι*, to endure. This verb is itself invoked at five important junctures in the drama. Each instance involves striking twists that punctuate the three main claims to be elaborated here: that endurance rather than survival is the central focus; that the play nevertheless offers a helpful taxonomy of survival narratives; and that Philoctetes' singular morality derives from a calculus of endurance.

The first time Philoctetes' experience is explicitly framed in terms of survival or endurance comes before he sets foot on stage. The chorus marvels at Philoctetes' suffering:

[17]Ian Watts famously identified Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as an important step in the rise of literary realism. See *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

[18]Citations of Greek and English are from the Loeb edition and are cited parenthetically by line number. *Sophocles II: Antigone, Women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library 21 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Here: translation modified.

[19]One exception may be the herbs he uses to dull the pain of his wound (649–50), but even that is a device for facilitating endurance rather than survival.

[20]Witness how this insistence on *technē* as a means of survival is a common feature of capitalism's answer to the current climate and health crises: human ingenuity will provide some gadget to mitigate global warming; a vaccine is in the works to save our lives! The alternative means of coping, say *sōphrosynē*—which would involve changing our attitudes, consumption, and behavior—are less persuasive.

[21]Not in the meaning, "to survive," at least. Plato uses *περιγίγνομαι* in the sense of "to defeat, overcome"; and Aristotle, in the extended sense of "to be a result of." See the entries in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* ed. Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie (LSJ) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 633, 1370.

πῶς ποτε πῶς δύσμορος ἀντέχει;

How, how does the unhappy man hold out? (175)

… ἔν τ᾽ ὀδύναις ὁμοῦ
λιμῷ τ᾽ οἰκτρός, ἀνήκεστ᾽ ἀμεριμνήματ᾽ ἔχων βάρη

… pitiable in his pain and hunger he endures afflictions incurable and uncared for. (185-86)

The first example is a question that could easily be translated into a modern idiom of survival: "How does the unhappy man survive?" The second relates Philoctetes' endurance of pain to onlookers' response of pity. But both of these instances involve forms of the verb *to have, to carry* (ἔχειν). The former (ἀντέχει) adds the prefix *anti-*, literally "to hold against," metaphorically to withstand, and hence endure. The latter (ἔχων) is a participle "having" or "bearing" with βάρη (plural of βάρος, "weight") as its direct object. Literally: "bearing burdens incurable and uncared for." In other words, both affects invited by the thought of Philoctetes' long isolation, admiration and compassion, are responses not to his triumph of active tenacity but rather to what he has passively borne and put up with.

The chorus's *strophe* makes clear my first point about survival in this play: that the operative virtue is one of endurance. This early expression of wonder is also the last time any character other than the wounded man himself praises Philoctetes for his fortitude. Forms of the verb τλῆναι (to endure) occur five times in the play.[22] Inflections of this verb will amplify my second and third points to elucidate two further remarkable features of Sophoclean endurance. Each occurrence of the verb τλῆναι is uttered by Philoctetes. Surprisingly, however, Philoctetes himself is the subject of only one of those verbs. The four instances with other subjects will illustrate my third and final point below. Only once does Philoctetes stress his own capacity for enduring suffering (537). This passage has a curious trajectory, however, that brings to light my second point. The verb τλῆναι is the central term in a three-step progress from potential Robinsonade to a masochistic neurosis. These three phases present a very suggestive taxonomy of all survival narratives.

Before outlining this process, however, it is necessary to place the speech in the context of the play's action. From the moment Philoctetes spies Neoptolemus, he tries to win the young man's sympathy in the hope of receiving passage off the island. Throughout their conversation, Philoctetes frames his story as one of undeserved suffering. Philoctetes' discourse in these passages could serve as a textbook example for Aristotle's definition of pity (*eleos*) in the *Rhetoric*.[23] One after another, he ticks off the three judgments that comprise compassion by demonstrating that his suffering is great, undeserved, and it could easily happen to Neoptolumus or someone close to him.[24] Yet once the affect of pity has been achieved and Neoptolemus agrees to let Philoctetes sail away with them, the tenor of the older man's narration changes. Now he wants to fill

[22]More than in any other Sophoclean tragedy other than *Ajax*, which has seven.
[23]See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. and ed. John Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) II.8.
[24]For a positive reading of the action of compassion in *Philoctetes*, see Martha Nussbaum, "The 'morality of pity': Sophocles' *Philoctetes,*" in *Rethinking Tragedy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 148–69.

in the gaps of the story and tell about his exploits. Instead of angling for pity, Philoctetes wants to win the young man's admiration.

In his first speech after Neoptolemus promises that they will sail away together, Philoctetes gives thanks and then commands:

> ἴωμεν, ὦ παῖ, προσκύσαντε τὴν ἔσω
> ἄοικον εἰσοίκησιν, ὥς με καὶ μάθῃς
> ἀφ᾽ ὧν διέζων ὥς τ᾽ ἔφυν εὐκάρδιος.
> οἶμαι γὰρ οὐδ᾽ ἂν ὄμμασιν μόνην θέαν
> ἄλλον λαβόντα πλὴν ἐμοῦ τλῆναι τάδε:
> ἐγὼ δ᾽ ἀνάγκῃ προύμαθον στέργειν κακά. (533-38)

> Let us go, my son, when we have saluted the home that is not a home inside, so that you may learn *how I contrived to live*, and what courage I displayed! I think that no other but me who had even set eyes on it could have *endured* this; but of necessity I gradually *learned to put up with hardships*. (emphasis mine)

Philoctetes starts out with an imperative for Neoptolemus to accompany him to his cave dwelling—the same one the young man had described in such pitiful detail to Odysseus at the beginning of the play. There, amidst the pus-filled bandages and ill-crafted cup, Philoctetes promises to narrate his accomplishments and what he lived through. At first it seems like the rhetoric of admiration is different from that of pity: instead of telling the young man what he had to bear, he wants Neoptolemus to "learn how I managed to stay alive (*διέζων*), and with what courage I was born" (535).[25] The verb *διάζειν* literally means "to live through." The lexicographers Liddell and Scott cite this very line as an example for the meaning, as here with the preposition *ἀπό*, for "to live off or by a thing." Hence the line could serve as the introduction to a deep dive into the details of how Philoctetes procured his food, made his clothes, built his shelter, etc. The wording of Lloyd-Jones's translation, "how I contrived to live," makes it sound like Neoptolemus is about to hear a survival narrative: a first-person Robinsonade.

But notice that the Crusoe tale, like the suicide of Jocasta or the blinding of Oedipus, must happen offstage. These details are not fitting for the tragic theater. Also, the invitation to relate these will never take place during the action of the play. Immediately after this speech, they are interrupted by a disguised "merchant," and the fast developing plot never allows Philoctetes to make good on his promise to narrate his Robinsonade. Moreover, the intimation of an offstage survival narrative is in any case superseded in the very next line: "I think that no other but me who had even set eyes on it could have *endured* (*τλῆναι*) this" (537). Here is the return of patient endurance rather than clever survival as the chief virtue worthy of praise. Philoctetes does not claim to be the only one who could have *lived through* his hardships, but rather the sole person who could have endured them. Curious in this context is the emphasis on sight. Elsewhere in the play other senses are stressed. The Greeks can't stand the stench of the suppurating wound (smell) or the wailing cries (sound) elicited by the excruciating pain

[25]Citing Seth Schein's translation: Sophocles, *Philoktetes* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Classical Library, 2003), 43.

(feeling). Philoctetes not only bears all of these, but he doubts that anyone else could even have put up with just the *sight* of his suffering. The stress on the organs of sight here invokes the necessary difficulties of communicating pain to others: rhetoric's famous goal, with the auditory signs of language, to place suffering "before the eyes" of its audience. Implicit in Philoctetes' claim to exceptionalism here is the sneer that other people would not be able even to listen to a vivid speech about his pain, much less endure the first-hand experience themselves. With this formula of τλῆναι, Philoctetes hits upon "his distinctive heroic nature."[26] Philoctetes is fundamentally a hero of endurance, not survival.

Yet Philoctetes does not end on this high note. He goes on to explain that "by necessity I learned to put up with (στέργειν) hardship" (538). Lloyd-Jones's translation misses an important valence of the word he renders as "put up with." The verb στέργειν in fact is rather shocking here. Its primary meaning is to "*love, feel affection*, freq. of the mutual *love* of parents and children"; more generally it means "*to be fond of, show affection for*." By extension it is sometimes used in the sense of "*to be content* or *satisfied, acquiesce*"; for which this line from the *Philoctetes* is cited as an example.[27] But it is hard not to hear the verb's primary sense of nurturing love, and the aorist προύμαθον, "learn gradually or by rote" [28] indicates that the long, weary process of learning to love his ills is accomplished rather than ongoing.

But what does it mean to learn not just to endure, but to love one's suffering? This is one of the perverse effects of trauma in humans. Woundedness has psychic consequences that can make sufferers reluctant to seek out a cure or incapable of undergoing treatment. Some become unwittingly attached to whatever damages their bodies and minds. Philoctetes, when later given the option of returning with the Greeks to Troy to be healed, categorically refuses. By capping this speech in praise of his handling of affliction with the verb for nurturing love, he reveals the inevitable, irrational, pathological perversions of trauma.[29] Every day for nine long years he has had to treat and care for his injury like a parent cleaning, changing, and clothing a small child. Which is not to say that, like any frustrated parent facing a toddler in a screaming tantrum, he will not wish to lop off his foot when the lesion acts up with unbearable pain (730-826). To paraphrase *Dr. Strangelove*, Philoctetes has not stopped worrying but has learned to love the wound.

This four-line speech is the only time Philoctetes uses the verb to endure (τλῆναι) with himself as its subject, and it also presents an inflection of the different ways his story could be told. He starts off promising an account of ingenuity and resourcefulness. But two lines later, Philoctetes turns this Crusoe narrative back into a tale of forbearance. And in a final gesture, he reveals the insidious neurosis of trauma. These three steps are also a generic catalog of the ways of reading (or telling) survival stories. The

[26]See the commentary in: Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ed. by Seth Schein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 210.

[27]See LSJ, 1639 (original emphasis).

[28]LSJ, 1489 (Again, this line from the *Philoctetes* is one of the dictionary's cited examples for this meaning).

[29]For an analysis of pathology in the play, see, Nancy Worman, "Infection in the Sentence: The Discourse of Disease in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Arethusa* 33 (2000): 1–36. For the problems of representing trauma, see Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 266–97.

tantalizing prospect of a realistic adventure tale turns out to be a classical chronicle of heroic endurance before unmasking itself as a diagnosis of the psychic woundedness underlying both. The Robinsonade becomes a martyrdom narrative, which calls for a case study in psychological trauma.

In each of Philoctetes' four other utterances of the verb *τλῆναι*, the subject is someone other than himself, but the object, interestingly enough, is the same: it's about *other people's* willingness to put up with Philoctetes' anguish, cries, and odor. This leads to my third and final observation about endurance in this play: it turns out to be equally a measure of other-directed compassion as it is of self-directed stoic fortitude. Philoctetes' praise and blame for endurance belong not only to the one suffering pain, but even more so to the ones witnessing another's misery.

The very first instance of *τλῆναι* in the play coincides with Philoctetes' formal supplication to Neoptolemus to be rescued from the island. It is an imperative form ordering the youth to endure the trouble of his company.

> I know well the discomfort that arises if you take me.
> But none the less put up with it! (*ὅμως δὲ τλῆθι*) (473-5)

He goes on to use moralizing language to promise Neoptolemus fame should he take him and shame should he not. Endurance of another's bothersome pain here is a moral as well as grammatical imperative. This lesson is amplified later on. After Philoctetes' agonizing attack of pain, in which he is reduced to inarticulate screams and then swoons into unconsciousness, he wakes up surprised to find that Neoptolemus has stuck around.

> Never, my son, would I have thought you would have endured (*τλῆναι*) to wait with pity throughout my suffering and to help me. (869-71)

Endurance is not only a mark of heroically suffering hardships; here Philoctetes invokes it to name the virtue of tolerating weakness. Philoctetes uses the same verb to tie his own bearing evils with Neoptolemus' bearing *other's suffering*. The pity that the young man feels for Philoctetes' suffering, it turns out, is a case of second-order endurance.

If compassion can be understood in this play as endurance of the second order, then one might expect the misfiring of compassion to revert to insulated first-order emotions. Instead, however, the next occurrence of *τλῆναι*—in the very next line of the play, no less—multiplies rather than simplifies the orders of endurance in the lack of sympathy. Philoctetes compares Neoptolemus' patience during his convulsion to the Greek generals who abandoned him on the island:

> *οὔκουν Ἀτρεῖδαι τοῦτ' ἔτλησαν εὐφόρως*
> *οὕτως ἐνεγκεῖν, ἀγαθοὶ στρατηλάται.*
> (872-3)

> The sons of Atreus did not endure to tolerate this easily, the noble generals!

This sentence is a triple whammy of forbearance: the Atreidai could not endure (*ἔτλησαν*) to bear (*ἐνεγκεῖν*) [Philoctetes' suffering] in an easily borne manner (*εὐφόρως*).[30] Considering that Philoctetes is the only one who actually had

to tolerate the pain, and not just its vocal and olfactory expression, this multiplication of endurance in the failure of compassion is striking. The Greeks not only neglected a duty; Philoctetes makes clear that their sin was not of omission but an active commitment to endure what should not be endured: they suffered not to suffer another's suffering with sufferance. Immoral neglect of others in this play is not simply a lack, but a compound failure of endurance. Philoctetes' understanding of compassion as second-order endurance is different from Aristotle's largely morally-neutral definition of pity as an emotion involving cognitive judgments in the *Rhetoric*. In fact, though Philoctetes can be seen to invoke Aristotle's three judgments in his own rhetorical self-presentation to Neoptolemus, his elaboration of levels of endurance here turns a rhetorical scene into an ethical doctrine.

If Philoctetes' math of moral failure is compound rather than commutative, then his idea of justice is emphatically retributive rather than distributive, as an early curse reveals: "This is what the sons of Atreus and the mighty Odysseus have done to me, my son; may the Olympian gods grant that in requital they suffer such things themselves!" (314-16). But the last occurrence of *τλῆναι* in the play, which Philoctetes utters at his absolute nadir, equips this proportional theory of punishment with a remarkable algebra of endurance. He now knows that Neoptolemus has deceived him in order to steal his bow for the Greek cause. Without the bow, he will starve and die on the island. He nevertheless refuses the chorus's entreaties to accompany them to Troy and answers them with violent curses:

> *ἐρρέτω Ἴλιον οἵ θ' ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ*
> *πάντες ὅσοι τόδ' ἔτλασαν ἐμοῦ ποδὸς ἄρθρον ἀπῶσαι*. (1200-01)
>
> May Ilium perish, and all those beneath it who had the heart (*ἔτλασαν*) to reject my tortured foot!

Philoctetes is using the verb *τλῆναι* to identify all those who refused to help him in in the past. He wishes destruction to all those who *endured* rejecting his foot. With this final instance, Philoctetes has encompassed all the Greeks in a set theory defined by endurance. In the first order, Philoctetes endures the pain of the wound, betrayal, and isolation. In the second order, Neoptolemus endures the pain of compassion for Philoctetes' plight. The Greeks, however, commit to a negative order of endurance: they endure their own refusal to endure another's pain. Previously, he complained that the Atreidai did not endure enduring his pain; now he accuses them of enduring to refuse him. This circuitous syntax is quite telling. By tying endurance to his curse, he *unites* the bad Greeks and the good ones by their signal agency of sufferance; at the same time, he turns the object of toleration into the chief mark of *distinction*. Philoctetes pushes this retributive calculus of endurance to its radical extreme. All those should perish who were willing to put up with abandoning a suffering person. The marker for punishment is not simply failing to endure another's pain but rather the successful endurance of one's own active choice to reject another suffering human being.

[30]The aorist infinitive *ἐνεγκεῖν* and the adverb *εὐφόρως* both come from the root *φέρειν*, to bear.

Nothing can convince Philoctetes to soften this spiteful stance. None of Neoptolemus' empathetic kindness, appeals to rational self-interest, or shaming tactics manage to persuade the wounded man to accompany the Greeks and receive his cure. The final exchange before Neoptolemus gives up and agrees to desert the Greeks and run away with Philoctetes is also the last formulation in the play that bears on survival:

Neoptolemus:
ὡς ῥᾷστ' ἐμοὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων λῆξαι, σὲ δὲ
ζῆν, ὥσπερ ἤδη ζῇς, ἄνευ σωτηρίας.

Philoctetes:

ἔα με πάσχειν ταῦθ' ἅπερ παθεῖν με δεῖ:

(1395-7)

Neoptolemus:
It is time for me to stop talking, and for you to go on living as you are living, without deliverance.

Philoctetes:
Let me suffer what I must suffer.[31]

Endurance, as seen above, allows for first and second orders: I can endure my own pain; and I can endure you enduring your pain. Survival, in contrast, seems not to admit of multiple orders: I can survive; but I cannot strictly survive your survival. Hence one might presume that survival does not offer any parallels to the complex moral calculus that Philoctetes derives from endurance. Philoctetes' response here can be understood as a corollary of that morality of toleration: suffer me to suffer! Yet Neoptolemus' preceding phrase suggests that the analogy with survival should be sought in a different plane. "To go on living as you are living" sounds like a formula of survival, but the next two words are revelatory: "without salvation" (*σωτηρίας*). If survival is a matter of one's own continuing to live, then a second-order survival could take the form of *saving* the life of someone else. Endurance yielded an ethics of toleration; survival could provide the basis for a doctrine of salvation.

The efficacy of such a soteriology, however, is immediately called into question by the logic and action of the scene at hand. Neoptolemus exclaims that Philoctetes must go on living *without deliverance*. Despite these words, he promises to deliver Philoctetes in his very next line: "If you wish, let us depart!" (1402). Yet this deliverance is the precise opposite of the salvation Neoptolemus has been preaching throughout the latter half of the play. Instead of returning to Troy with Philoctetes to win glory and be cured, he acquiesces to betray his countrymen and run away with the wounded cripple. When humans try to save other damaged humans, it seems, salvation is damning. This "deliverance" is what triggers the final appearance of Heracles, the deus ex machina necessary to set things right at the end of Sophocles' play. If the concept of survival leads to an ethics of salvation, then it also requires an interventionary divine order. Any morality derived from the logic of survival would rely on theism lest it go woefully astray: it would have to be guaranteed by the gods.

[31]Translation modified.

Ursula Krechel's *Stimmen aus dem harten Kern* and Heiner Müller's *Philoktet*

Many adaptations of *Philoctetes* have followed the hobbling footsteps of Fénelon's first modern reintroduction of the story in his popular novel, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699), where Philoctéte echoes in less complex tones Sophocles' stress on endurance. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* appeared just twenty years after Fenelon's courtly romance, and no version of Philoctetes has been the same since Crusoe's island made the Greek myth a retrospective *Robinsonade*. Instead of stumbling speedily through a long litany of many adaptations,[32] I focus here on two in which the parallels with the lines drawn from Sophocles are most striking. Though Ursula Krechel's *Stimmen aus dem harten Kern* (*Voices from the Bitter Core*, 2005) is chronologically later, I turn to it first because it exhibits in definitive completion the metamorphosis from endurance to survival. The language of survival in Heiner Müller's *Philoktet* (1965), meanwhile, provides salient counterpoints to the aspects of endurance in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* analyzed above. Finally, these readings invite a return to the question of survival's reoccupation of endurance and its challenge to Blumenberg's work on myth.

Krechel's long poem is a brilliant, grueling diagnosis of man's (the gendered noun here is appropriate because of its condemnation of *masculine* humanity) penchant for violence and war. In twelve sections of twelve stanzas of twelve lines, the poem mercilessly lays bare many layers of trauma soldiers inflict on others and themselves. The "voices" include eager new recruits, sufferers of PTSD, calculating generals, and both victims and perpetrators of war crimes from Troy to the present day. Two sections stand out for their focalization through concrete figures—one historical: the self-aggrandizing poet and adventurer Lord Byron with the club foot (III); one mythic: Philoktet with the lame foot (XI). The latter is told entirely from the point of view of Philoktet (even though the speaking voice moves from first, to second, to third person, and back). Neoptolemus does not appear and Odysseus is barely mentioned. The central event of the narration is Philoktet's call back to war after his long abandonment. Instead of resisting this summons and cursing the Greeks for betraying him, Krechel's Philoktet is eager to rejoin the battle. The poem's transformation of endurance into survival helps explain Philoktet's readiness to be deployed, which is the chief point of difference between Krechel and Sophocles.

In its very first lines, Philoktet frames his narrative explicitly *against* the endurance rubric:

> Dies ist mein Fuß, dies ist der pochende Schmerz, hier
> Schleppt sich fort, was nicht zu ertragen, schleppe mich
> Selbst … (XI.1)
>
> This is my foot, this is the throbbing pain, it drags
> Itself along here, not to be endured, drag myself
> On my own … [33]

[32]For a summary of the reception of *Philoctetes*, see Schein's commentary *Philoctetes* (2013): 43–57.

[33]Ursula Krechel, *Voices from the Bitter Core*, bi-lingual edition, trans. Amy Strawser (Austin, TX: Host Publications, 2010), 264–5. Quotes are from this edition, cited parenthetically by section and stanza.

Philoktet's wound is something *not to be endured*. The poem opens by expressly rejecting the valorization of steadfast forbearance. Instead, forms of survival are the principle interest of the poem, as evidenced in four successive formulations.

Survival first appears in the language of evolutionary biology: "… gut wäre es, / ich verschrottete mich selbst und nur/Das Kampf-Gen, die Kampfhundmentalität überlebte als ein Klon/Von Philoktet" (XI.4).[34] The stranded Philoktet fantasizes a process of unnatural selection in which only the aggressive characteristics are reproduced in a clone. This fantasy is realized in the second half of section XI, in which Philoktet returns to military service. In an interior monologue of deliberation, Philoktet formulates the choice as one between solitary uselessness and collective survival: "… wie willst du altern, ein gedörrter Fisch auf trockenem Land/Willst du dich sehen, eingeklemmt in eine Einheitsfront des Überlebens/Willst du das Kollektiv?" (XI.10).[35] Survival figures as a token of individual worth for genetic breeding in the first instance and becomes an achievement of unified teamwork in the second.

Finally, survival replaces not only the endurance of injury but also its healing. In addition to the festering sore on his foot, Philoktet's wound here consists in his exclusion from his capacity as a soldier. In order to cure this wound of decommissioning, it is necessary for Philoktet to forget the causes of his trauma. As he leaves the island to return to military service, Philoktet imagines a prize "fürs standhafte Überleben ohne Erinnerung" before declaring in his final two lines: "Ich werde wiederkommen … /Wieder töten … ich will nicht lernen" (XI.12).[36] This therapy is not a matter of working through and dealing with trauma, but of repressing it so that he can be re-traumatized again and again. Far from the humanizing virtue of endurance and the promise of a cure in Sophocles' tragedy, in Krechel's poem survival instrumentalizes Philoktet so that he can better serve as a weapon to continue killing.

Heiner Müller's *Philoktet* complements Krechel's indictment of the military and the logic of service. Though Müller's play shares the same setting, characters, and situation as Sophocles' tragedy, a brief summary of the action shows how radically it departs from the ancient template.[37] The German play roughly follows the Greek plot until the return of the bow, after which Neoptolemus ends up killing Philoktet from behind, and Odysseus transports his corpse for its propaganda potential back to Troy. Philoktet never begs for pity but instead performs a solo symphony of curse-laced invective.

[34]"… it would be good if I scrapped myself and only / The combat gene, the combat dog mentality survived as a clone / Of Philoctetes" (271).

[35]"… how do you want to age, a dried-up fish on dry land / Do you want to see yourself jammed into a unified front of survival / Do you want the collective?" (283).

[36]"… for steadfast survival without memory … " "I will come again … kill again … I do not want to learn" (287).

[37]For a helpful collection of materials about the play's evolution, production history, and critical reception, see Wolfgang Storch and Klaudia Ruschkowski, ed., *Die Lücke im System*: *Philoktet Heiner Müller Werkbuch* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2005). For other treatments of the function of myth in Müller's *Philoktet*, see Michael Ostheimer, *Mythologische Genauigkeit: Heiner Müllers Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie der Tragödie* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2001), and Brigitte Kaute, "The Challenge of Myth: Heiner Müller's *Philoctetes*," *Literature & Theology* 19, no. 4 (2005): 327–45. Kaute's article is especially insightful in amending Blumenberg to show how "work on myth is work with myth *upon* reflective discourse […]—a kind of work which cannot be done by reflective discourse itself" (328). None, however, pursues the question of survival.

Clearly no edifying hymn to stoic endurance nor engrossing narrative of survival ingenuity is in the cards here. Yet in its dramatic constellation and artful language, Müller's play is decidedly Sophoclean. Each character has a distinct way of perceiving the world, and the three perspectives collide throughout the play. The verbal shards of these collisions fall into scintillating mosaics that make up the dialog of the drama. The dizzying cleverness of the back-and-forth stichomythia and the powerful expressiveness of the longer speeches harken back to the style and vatic wisdom of Sophocles' tragedies.

The three facets of survival explored in *Philoctetes* reveal remarkable refractions when compared to Müller's *Philoktet*. First, endurance is replaced by survival as the primary value of maintaining life. Second, from the taxonomy of potential survival narratives mapped out in Sophocles' text, Müller's is a fulfillment of the final one: a scathing diagnosis of trauma. Finally, the German play adds a further category to the ethics derived from algebras of endurance and survival. Just as Sophocles' drama formulates moralities of tolerance and salvation alongside their critiques, Müller's play is an appreciative deconstruction of utilitarianism.

Considering how pervasive endurance is in the Greek tragedy, the utter lack of forbearance is remarkable in its German reworking. Philoktet never angles for pity by stressing the magnitude of his suffering nor does he brag about how much he has managed to put up with. Unlike Philoctetes, Philoktet despises both sympathy and admiration.[38] The only mention of endurance in the play comes from Odysseus. When Neoptolemus is threatening to return the bow to Philoktet, Odysseus complains: "Hättst du das Lügen länger ausgehalten" (44).[39] This is a curious echo of Philoctetes' accusations that the Greeks were guilty of enduring their immoral actions, but the sentiment is twisted to have the opposite meaning. For Odysseus lying to save lives is no crime.[40] In fact, Odysseus had already warned Neoptolemus not to pamper his own principles at the cost of his fellow soldiers' lives:

NEOPTOLEMUS
Was verlangst du?
ODYSSEUS
Daß du in unsrer Sache dich nicht schonst.
NEOPTOLEMUS
Das Leben zu behalten leb ich nicht.
ODYSSEUS
Noch andres das dir mehr sein mag als Leben. (12)

NEOPTOLEMUS
What is your command?

[38]For the transformations of sympathy between Sophocles and Müller, see Ellwood Wiggins, "Cold War Compassion: The Politics of Pity in Tom Stoppard's *Neutral Ground* and Heiner Müller's *Philoktet*," *Literatur für Leser*, 4–15 (2015): 255–69.

[39]"If only you had endured lying a little longer." Heiner Müller, *Philoktet / Herakles 5* (Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp, 1969). Cited parenthetically by page number. Translations are mine.

[40]For the relationship of lying and language in the play, see Rainer Nägele, "Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralishen Sinn," in: *Lücke im System*, 268–80. See also Markus Wilczek's insightful analysis of Philoktet's language in *Das Artikulierte und das Inartikulierte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012) 38–59.

ODYSSEUS
That you not spare yourself in our cause.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I don't live in order to preserve my life.

ODYSSEUS
Something else that may mean more to you than life.

Odysseus demands that Neoptolemus not "spare himself," and the young man is immediately offended: he's quite willing to die for the cause! But he has misinterpreted Odysseus' command. He hears "don't spare yourself," but Odysseus means "don't spare your self," i.e., the precious principles or emotions that contribute to your sense of who you are. If Neoptolemus succumbs to pity or moral qualms and fails to retrieve Philoctetes' bow, then thousands more will die unnecessarily on the plains of Troy. Odysseus demands that Neoptolemus not "go easy on" his self by indulging in heroic ideals; by enduring the damage to his self-image that deception and trickery entail, he will enable the survival of more men.

This utilitarian morality of the ends justifying the means will return in greater relief later on, but for now it is significant that already on the second page of the play Neoptolemus responds to an imperative about fine moral distinctions with a formula not of endurance but of survival: "I don't live in order to preserve my life." Neoptolemus tries to disown mere survival as an objective, but the formula proves to be ubiquitous in this play. It is evident that survival has replaced endurance as a fundamental category for the intentions and consequences of characters' actions. Odysseus says to Neoptolemus, "Ich brauch dich lebend und noch brauchst du mich so" (14).[41] Philoctetes' very first words on stage when he beholds Neoptolemus: "Ein Lebendes auf meinem toten Strand" (20).[42] Survival—the condition of living versus dying—is the primary cipher through which all three characters interpret the world and its values.

In contrast to this initial address to Neoptolemus as "a living thing," Philoktet describes himself as "Ein Leichnam, der sich nährt von seinem Grab" (21).[43] This striking formulation illustrates the play's relation to the classification of survival narratives introduced by Philoctetes in Sophocles' tragedy (533-38). On offer there was a progress from Robinsonade (survival) to martyrdom narrative (endurance) to psychological case study (trauma). Müller's *Philoktet* bypasses the first two genres entirely and the title character can be read in his entirety as a commentary on human woundedness.[44]

In fact, the language of the play is so insistent on the codependency of death and life that it invents arresting new locutions for it on nearly every page. Life for Philoktet has become a kind of dying. The bow, the means by which he has survived for ten years, he describes as "Grad gut genug mein Sterben zu verlängern" (30).[45] Philoktet's existence is a prime example for Giorgio Agamben's conception of "bare life," which he describes

[41]"I need you alive, and you still need me that way too."
[42]"A living thing on my dead shore."
[43]"A corpse that nourishes itself from its grave."
[44]For a reading of Heiner Müller's work as therapy for psychic trauma, see Peter Staatsmann, *Theater des Unbewussten: Der selbstanalytische Prozess im dramatischen Schreiben Heiner Müllers*. (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2015).
[45]"Just good enough to prolong my death."

as "life exposed to death."[46] Like the *homo sacer,* Philoktet has been banished from the social group for disturbing institutionalized rituals, and abandoned to subsist alone on meager fare that he must scrape together with a bow and a bum leg. This is a death sentence without an execution. Bare life, at its most basic, is survival pure. Philoktet is a figure of the irreparable and permanent harm such a prolonged condition inflicts. Forgiveness and promise, the two operations Hannah Arendt proposes as remedies for the unforeseeable and inevitable abuses we commit,[47] are utterly impotent in the extremity of trauma that bare survival has inflicted on Philoktet. Barring the miracle of a non-existent deus ex machina, there can be no healing of this wound: the only cure for bare life is death.

Philoktet's case study in the trauma of survival also invites a revision of the ethical systems derived from Sophocles' play. First-order endurance is the hallmark of classical stoicism (though stoics from Cicero to Adam Smith have derided Philoctetes for his unmanly screams) and endurance of the second order leads to an ethics of toleration. First-order survival, meanwhile, implies a kind of Thrasymachean social Darwinism where strength and fitness make right. Second-order survival, as suggested above, could be a soteriological mandate to save the lives of others. Sophocles' play shows that, without the guiding intervention of a divine power, this salvation directive can easily lead to more suffering. In *Philoktet*, however, Odysseus seems to uphold a fifth alternative for an ethics based on a calculation of survival. He weighs the sheer number of lives at stake in deliberating courses of action. When at the mercy of Philoktet's vengeful bow, Odysseus reckons:

> Dreitausend schlachtest du, mich tötend, einen
> Dreitausend tot bleibt Troja heil, die Stadt
> Und wenn die heil bleibt hin sind unsre Städte. (47)
>
> You slaughter three thousand by killing me, one guy
> Three thousand dead preserves Troy, the city
> And if Troy is preserved, gone are our cities.

This computation of the greatest number of survivals for the smallest number of deaths is a version of utilitarianism, which traditionally aims to maximize 'the greatest amount of good for the greatest number.' In the scene from which the above passage comes, Odysseus even offers his own life should Philoktet agree to return to Troy with Neoptolemus. The sincerity of this claim is certainly questionable: we are dealing with Odysseus, after all. But whether rhetorical ploy or honest martyrdom, the logic of Odysseus' speech is that the ends justify the means when it comes to the survival count.

Ultimately, however, even this well-meaning utilitarianism ends up under the law of bare life. Odysseus neglects the "good" but focuses only on the greatest number. We have seen how Odysseus schools Neoptolemus to shed all qualms of conscience in order to save more lives. When the sheer survival score becomes paramount, the quality of the lives saved is sacrificed. Humans are rendered instruments to the population-tally.

[46]Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 88.
[47]Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 244.

In the end, even Philoktet's dead body will become the means by which Odysseus will animate the Greek soldiers back at Troy and serve to bring the war to a life-sparing close. Once Philoktet is dead, Odysseus commands,

> Gehn wir also, tauschen wieder
> […] Das Bild des kaum Begrabnen mit dem Blick
> Der Leiber, die den Grund begraben, der
> Sie zu begraben nicht mehr ausreicht, zu viele
> Getötet und zu schnell. (52)

> Let us go then and exchange again
> […] The image of this barely buried corpse for the sight
> Of the bodies that bury the ground that
> Isn't big enough to bury them, too many
> Killed and too fast.

Potential survival is only achieved by certain death. For Odysseus, no less than for Philoktet, life serves death and death serves life. The verbs *dienen* (to serve), *brauchen* (to use), and their derivatives *dienlich, brauchbar* (serviceable, useful) occur with shocking frequency in the play. This overdetermined language of service is echoed in Krechel's poem as well: "wenn / Man ihn braucht, man braucht ihn, braucht er sich als ein Gebrauchter" (XI.9).[48] A utilitarian ethics of survival cannot escape the logic of bare life and hence the incurable trauma of living death that Philoktet suffers.

The bow of Heracles or Heraclitus?

Though Müller's ending seems radically different from that of the Greek drama, its logic is encapsulated by a prescient remark Sophocles' Philoctetes makes after his bow has been taken:

> *ἀπεστέρηκας τὸν βίον τὰ τόξ' ἑλών* (931)

> By taking my bow you have deprived me of my life!

This line plays with the similar sounds of life (*βίος*) and bow (*βιός*). This very pun is the main feature of one of Heraclitus' most quoted fragments in antiquity:

> 66. *τῷ οὖν τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος.*[49]

> The name of the bow is life, but its work is death.

Life needs death in order to maintain itself. As Müller's Philoktet makes explicit, death serves life, but life is also always serving death. This paradox is central to the very next Heraclitus fragment in Bywater's numbering: "Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal,

[48]"when / He is needed, he is needed, he is in need of himself as one who is utilized" (281).

[49]Quoted from the Loeb edition: Hippocrates and Heracleitus, *On the Universe*, ed. and trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959) 490. For an insightful reflection on antinomies in Heraclitus, see Eva Brann, *The Logos of Heraclitus* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2011), 73–86.

living in their death and dying in their life."[50] Sophocles' Philoctetes sums up this analysis of survival in his own indictment of "bare life": he rounds off his accusatory list of awful things Odysseus did to him by saying he was left "a corpse among the living" (*ἐν ζῶσιν νεκρόν*, 1018). The instrumentality of life for death is one constant in the divergent concerns between these three versions of the Philoctetes myth spanning millennia, languages, and cultures.

But does this acknowledgment of the unity of death and life amount to an adequate answer to our initial questions about the "improbable survival" of myth? The Heraclitian oppositional harmony to which the dissonance between these instances of work on myth have brought us proves long-lasting. Perhaps that is due to its suggestive obscurity and resulting font of Blumenbergian "meaningfulness" (*Bedeutsamkeit*). It carries the aura of significance, but fortuitously hides—like Heraclitus' nature[51]—before it can be explicated with analytic precision. Does myth in this account again fall prey to the same problem Blumenberg identifies with Freudian or Jungian explanations for myth's deep psychological archetypes? "In this type of explanation, the capacity for survival that a fictive material possesses becomes a piece of 'nature,' and thus something into which further inquiry is impossible" (WM, 151; AM, 167). As long as one insists on divining a "meaning" of the myth, nature's penchant for inscrutability will win out.[52] But observe instead the way the textual record of the work on this myth affords a *history* of shifting concerns (from endurance to survival), a *taxonomy* of generic forms (Robinsonade, martyrdom narrative, psychological case study), and an *etiology* of moral values as calculations of tolerance or survival (stoicism, tolerance, social Darwinism, soteriology, and utilitarianism). These discoveries are only recognizable because of the "test of selection" and the "durability over and against time's process of attrition" (WM, 160; AM, 177) that determines what counts as myth in the first place.

Far from debunking Blumenberg's anthropological claims about myth, therefore, pointing out survival's recent nascency actually shores up and elaborates them. Rereading Blumenberg with endurance rather than survival as a "guiding metaphor," for instance, can build a bridge between stoicism and Epicureanism in late antiquity. These rival camps, so different in their political and philosophical commitments, have radically opposing appreciations of Philoctetes' forbearance.[53] Yet both have in common their reliance on endurance as a model for how to deal with life's suffering. Similarly in the late twentieth century, communists and capitalists would seem to be widely antithetical, yet both depend on "survival" as a term of ideological justification.[54] Interestingly, however, Tom Stoppard and Heiner Müller, on opposing sides of the Iron Curtain, wrote versions of Philoctetes with striking political resonances.[55] The re-occupation of endurance with survival provides an explanation for the discrepancy in the first instance

[50] *ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι, ζῶντες τὸν ἐκεί-νων θάνατον, τὸν δὲ ἐκείνων βίον τε θνεῶτες*. Heraclitus, 492. Translation mine.

[51] *φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ*. Heraclitus, 472. ("Nature loves to hide.")

[52] For Blumenberg's resistance to deployable "claims" and the mythic narrativization of philosophy, see Kirk Wetters, "Working Over Philosophy: Hans Blumenberg's Reformulations of the Absolute," *Telos* 158, no. Spring (2012): 100–18.

[53] For the Stoics' disapproval of Philoctetes, see Nussbaum, "Morality of Pity"; for the Epicurean approbation of Philoctetes, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, "On Nietzsche's Search for Happiness and Joy: Thinking with Epicurus," *Agonist* 10, no. 11 (2017): 41–58, here: 48–50.

[54] See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

[55] See Wiggins, "Cold War Compassion," 13–15.

and the similarity in the second. Stoics and Epicureans both preach forbearance, but differ in their modes of living with pain. Once communism and capitalism turn to evolutionary models of survival, however, all difference is erased at the lowest common denominator of "bare life."

This essay began with the hypothesis of a shift from endurance to survival across time, but what this preliminary foray has struck upon instead is an underlying commonality in the way death clings to life. The myth of survival, to return to Blumenberg, so pervasive in today's scientific, economic, and sociological discourses, was born out of the death and resurrection of earlier forms of passive perseverance. In the case of Philoctetes, it's precisely his woundedness and radical unfitness for full life that make both his character and his story abiding. In the evolution of myth, endurance outlives survival after all.

Notes on contributor

Ellwood Wiggins is an Associate Professor of German at the University of Washington, Seattle. He is the author of *Odysseys of Recognition: Performing Intersubjectivity in Homer, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Kleist* (2019).