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"A Grief Observed: Tecmessa and her Sadness-Work in Sophocles' *Ajax*"

Chorus: There she is! The young bride, captive of his spear,
Tecmessa, I see her. She's steeped in this cry of **grief** (*oiktos*). (894-5)

Chorus: The pangs of true **pain** (*gennaia dyē*), I know, pierce your heart. (938)

Tecmessa: These things would not have reached this state but for the gods.
Chorus: Too heavy indeed is the burden of **grief** (*achthos*) they've contrived." (950-1) [1]

> "Tonight all the hells of young **grief** have opened again; the mad word, the bitter resentment, the fluttering of the stomach, the nightmare unreality, the wallowed-in tears. For in **grief** nothing 'stays put.' One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats…I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. **Sorrow**, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history,…**Grief** is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape."
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> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (1962, 69-71)

This essay will study the onset of grief and the process of mourning at one particular point in the post-suicide portion of *Ajax*, namely the so-called *epi-parodos* ('second parodos', 868-78) and third *kommos* (semi-musical dialogue of lamentation between the chorus and Tecmessa, 879-973). A new examination of these passages, and especially the *kommos*, is timely because a key part of the Greek text that has long been controversial -- Tecmessa's two speeches at the end of each strophe and antistrophe (915-24 and 961-73) -- has now been restored to more secure footing by P.J. Finglass. [2] My objective is to argue that one of Sophocles' first priorities immediately after Ajax's suicide (865) is to engage his actors and audience in the process of 'working through' the psychological and moral wounds of his death. [3] This cathartic process is important because it

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[1] All translations are my own, usually fairly literal and usually modified from Esposito (2010); I follow the Greek text in Finglass' edition (2011).

[2] See Finglass *CQ* (2009) and (2011) *ad loc*.

[3] Cf. Simon (1978) 274: "the term 'working through,' particularly in relation to the tragic conception of knowledge through suffering…connotes a willingness to suffer the consequences of one's choice, and not to short-cut the process of grief and anguish by seeking palliatives…It is not insight alone that allows for change and growth; the process of gaining the insight is probably at least as important as the insight itself." On Ajax's process of 'working through' in *Ajax* and on Achilles' process in the *Iliad* see Simon 128 and 72-77. This idea is related to Jonathan Shay's concept

provides some sort of 'purification' or 'cleansing relief' for the emotions (*pathēmata*) of the audience (Aristotle *Poetics* 6, 1449b24-28). Such catharsis usually comes about through a process of *witnessing* the tragic action, *recognizing / understanding* (*anagnōrisis*) why that action has been done, and thereby *beginning to make whole again* the emotional world that has been ruptured by that action; in our case that action is Ajax's suicide. [4] In order to establish the context for my argument I'll first set forth the relevant storyline and highlight the portions important for my discussion. In the second section I'll present my interpretation of the third *kommos*.

PART I: Ajax's suicide: A grief observed?

Just before Ajax's suicide, Tecmessa – his spear-won Phrygian slave / concubine / bride / wife / widow / mother of his son (210, 331, 448-50, 654, 894, 940) -- comes to realize that she's been *deceived* (*āpatēmenē*, 807) about her husband and cast out from his *ancient kindness / former favor* (*charitos…ek-beblēmenē*, 808; cf. 522). Having arrived at this realization, she attempts to forestall *the stroke of inevitable destiny* (*anankaia tychē*, 803) which threatens to destroy Ajax just as it had once threatened to destroy her. The same phrase recurs in the very first line of her powerful reply (485-524) to Ajax's first major speech (430-80) in which he explains his conception of the heroic code and warrior 'nobility' (*eu-geneia*, 480). At 485 Tecmessa uses the phrase *Aias…anankaias tychēs* where the word-play on his name -- *Aias…anank-aias* -- obliquely reminds us that she, though once free, is now *his* spear-won slave: 'O master Ajax, there's no greater evil for mortals than *the stroke of inevitable destiny*.' [5] But right now she wonders, where *is* Ajax? She urges his sailors to search for their captain and to summon his half-brother Teucer. They split into two groups and rush from the orchestra in opposite directions (813-4). Such choral

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of 'griefwork'; he argues "that healing from trauma depends upon communalization of the trauma – being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community." Shay (1994) 4.

[4] On catharsis see Easterling (1996) 178: "For Aristotle the cathartic process seems to be a continuous whole: recognition and the painful emotions that it generates, witnessed with pity and fear by the audience, are not separated off, as in the communal weeping model, into immediate emotional release and (often subsequent) intellectual reflection."; cf. Segal (1996) 156-57.

[5] Compare other puns on Ajax's name at 370, 430-32, 904, 914.

exits occur four other times in extant tragedy but nowhere else are they used to isolate a character. [6] Tecmessa rushes off as well.

The emptiness of the theatrical space *and* the silent pause in the action heighten the tension. To this unusual scenario Sophocles adds another anomaly -- a change of scene / location, which occurs only once elsewhere in extant tragedy (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 235-53). [7] The stage-set no longer represents the ground in front of Ajax's hut on the Trojan coast but rather the 'untrodden spot' (*chōron…astibē*, 652) where he said he was headed to dig a hole and 'hide' his sword (657-9). And indeed he was telling the truth, albeit ambiguously – for Ajax's 'untrodden spot' is the very seaside 'thicket' (*napos*, 892) where Tecmessa will soon discover her impaled husband and his 'hidden' sword.

Into this empty space and silent place Ajax enters alone from the main stage-door and calmly delivers his suicide soliloquy (815-65), announcing that, 'with one swift leap that brings no convulsions, no struggle' (833-4), Hector's sword will rip through his ribs. His earlier sense of shame has subsided somewhat. [8] Whether his suicide occurs in the audience's full view or somewhere off-stage remains controversial. What can't be doubted, I think, is that even if the suicide didn't *actually* occur onstage, it's a *virtual* on-stage act. [9] Ajax's intense descriptive focus on the sword, its fixity, and his leap onto it (815-23, 833-4) as well as the carefully designed solitariness of the theatrical setting – his soliloquy occupies the entire scene, conspicuously framed by the frantic choral exit and re-entry – all this contributes to a sense of tense anticipation, especially if Ajax has entered with his sword. [10] It hasn't been observed before, to the best of my knowledge, that Sophocles places consistent linguistic emphasis on the *public* revelation of Ajax, first as the sick man 'in full view' (*peri-phanē*, 66), then as the madman 'in full view' (*peri-phanōs*,

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[6] Taplin (1977) 375-6 notes the other choral exits: *Eumenides* 225-35; *Alcestis* 746-861; *Helen* 385—515; *Rhesus* **564-674**.

[7] Change of scene after 814: thus the great majority of scholars, e.g. Campbell (1881); Stanford (1963); Kamerbeek (1963); Gardiner (1979) 12; Seale (1982) 163; Taplin (1983) 151; Taplin (*SAS*, 2015) 187, 190; Lloyd-Jones (Loeb, 1994) 105; Scott (1996) 84; Hubbard (2003) 164; Finglass (2011) 12 and 376; Liapis (2015) 131-2, 139; Battezzato (2015) 233; Most (2015) 291.

[8] Gibert (1995) 132-3.

[9] Cf. Seale (1982) 165: "Even if the final moments of death are concealed in some way by the screen of bushes, the spectators must feel that they have witnessed the act. The text and the dramatic development require a visual, not an imagined climax."

[10] A brief list of scholars who think Ajax's sword is *visible* during his suicide speech: e.g. Taplin in Reverdin and Grange (1983) 151; Taplin (trans. 2015) 77, 312; Taplin (*SAS*, 2015) 187; Stanford (1963) 166; Seale (1982) 163; Lloyd-Jones (Loeb 1994) 105; Liapis (2015) 141-145, especially on the importance of *deictic* pronouns in Ajax's suicide speech; *contra* Finglass (*SAS* 2015) 195-206.

81), and finally as the man about to die 'in full view' (*peri-phantos*, 229; cf. *pro-dēlōs*, 1311). [11] Why would Sophocles repeatedly raise this expectation of conspicuous display only to disappoint at the climactic moment? Oliver Taplin, among many others, believes that Ajax kills himself on-stage in full view of the audience: "Aias, on stage by himself, prepares for death, and ends by throwing himself onto his fixed sword….It is a plausible guess that the solo death was the core of Sophocles' conception, and that he built the rest of the play round that." [12]

An on-stage suicide would also produce a stunning contrast to the treatment of his predecessor and arch-rival Aeschylus who had Ajax commit suicide *offstage*. The hero had grown frustrated in his attempts to stab himself; finally a goddess appeared and showed him the one spot he had to strike -- his armpit. The suicide is reported by a messenger in the only fragment to survive from Aeschylus' (now lost) *Thracian Women* (named after the chorus), the second play of his *Ajax* trilogy: "And, since his skin would not yield anywhere to the fatal blow, he kept bending his sword, like a man drawing a bow, until some goddess appeared and showed him the place." [13] Certainly it would be very much in keeping with Sophocles' many innovative tendencies in this play to deviate radically from his predecessor by showing the suicide *on-stage*. Such deviation would be all the more stunning since it is quite likely that Sophocles' unique stagecraft here -- the scene-change and frantic choral exit at 815 and re-entry at 865 -- seem to be consciously imitating Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, where the Furies exit to pursue Orestes (235), then the scene changes from Delphi to Athens, and the Furies re-enter in disarray (253). [14]

PART II: Tecmessa's reaction: a grief observed

Immediately after the suicide, however it's staged, the tragedy begins again. It commences, as did the prologue, with a second search for the protagonist. But this is a 'mirror scene' *in reverse* -- now the mission, initiated by a human female (Tecmessa), is conducted by Ajax's friends,

[11] I first proposed this idea in Esposito (2010) note at 815 and pp. 200-202.

[12] Taplin (2015, trans.) 77; cf. 312-13. Other believers in Ajax's *on-stage* suicide include the Scholiast on 864, translated in Arnott (1962) 133 and Pöhlmann (1997) 42; Campbell and Abbott (1876) 48 and 94; Flickinger (1918) 244; Taplin (1978) 86 and 189, n. 5; Garrison (1995) 52; Garvie (1998) 203; Mastronarde (2012); Liapis (2015) 141, 147, 153-4.

[13] Aeschylus fragment 83, translated by Sommerstein (2008) 100-1; cf. Mills (1980-81) 130-31; March (1991-3) 4-8; Garvie (1998) 4; Finglass (2011) 33.

[14] On Sophocles' *conscious imitation* of Aeschylus here see Scott (1996) 286, n. 199; cf. Taplin (1977) 376, 378-81, 417.

whereas the earlier search, initiated by a divine female (Athena), was conducted by his enemy; and now its target is a dead man, not a living one; and now it aims to prevent an act of violence, not respond to one.[15] This technique of repeated 'search scenes' divides the drama into two different phases of discovery, and simultaneously signals the *causal* connection between the two searches with the first motivating the second – the failure of Ajax's attempted night-time murder of the Greek commanders motivates his suicide and the subsequent second search.[16]

In the 'second parodos' the two half-choruses of sailors re-enter the orchestra in disarray and in staggered fashion from opposite entry-ramps (866-78); such stagecraft is unparalleled elsewhere in extant Sophocles. The intense angst of this second beginning -- full of exclamatory lamentations (*iō tlēmōn*; *outoi theatos*; *ōmoi teknon*) and conspicuous verbal echoes between strophe and antistrophe (*tis an…tis an*, 879 ~ *emelles…emelles*, 925; *ōmo-thumon*, 885 ~ *ōmo-phrōn*, 930; *iō moi moi*, 891 ~ *iō moi moi*, 937) – all this emotional upheaval is contained within and framed by a complex, highly-balanced metrical and thematic structure: the transitional astrophic *epi-parodos* (lyric exchange between the leaders of the hemi-choruses: 866-78) is followed by an epirrhematic lyric dialogue of lament (*kommos*: 879-973) between Tecmessa and the chorus, composed of symmetrical strophic and antistrophic pairs (879-914 = 925-60) in which she speaks her iambic lines while the chorus recites or sings in agitated meters.[17]

The first words of the *epi-parodos* are memorable and thematically significant: *ponos ponōi ponon pherei. pai, pai, pai…*, "Toil heaps toil upon toil. Where, where, where (have we not wandered)?" (866-8). As F.W. Schneidewin observes, "The *par-ech-esis* [the *ech*oing likeness of sound] expresses here the *accumulate*d weight of useless toil which they have endured."[18] *Ponos ponōi ponon* does indeed express the burdensome toil that the choral search parties have just endured. But I suggest that this conspicuous phrase also foreshadows the burdensome toil still to be borne and that it's the job of the play's last 500 lines to bear that burden. Furthermore I suggest that the emphatic *poly-ptoton* of *ponos ponōi ponon,* i. e. the consecutive repetition of *ponos* in three different cases, added to the panting alliteration of *pai pai pai*, may be taken as indicators of

[15] Kamerbeek (1953) at 874; Taplin (1977) 379-85, Taplin (1978)148-9; Burton (1980) 32; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 57; Hubbard (2003) 164; Finglass (2011) 390.

[16] Seale (1982) 166; Garrison (1995) 52; Finglass (2011) 390. On the play's 'double plot,' i.e. divine retribution and human quarrel, see Tyler (1974).

[17] On the structure of 866-973 see Esposito (2010) *ad loc*.

[18] Schneidewin (1853) at 866.

the three toils that remain, all of which are presented in this lyric dialogue -- namely, the *toil* of finding Ajax (868-914), the *toil* of attaining his proper burial (915-24); and the *toil* of warding off those who would forbid Ajax's burial and subsequently enslave Tecmessa and Eurysaces (944-73).

The last two words of the *epi-parodos* announce that this will be a scene of significant revelation: 'Nowhere along the path does the man…*reveal / make clear his presence (dēloi phaneis*, 878).' But suddenly Tecmessa, in a highly unusual entry between the choral and dialogue part of the first strophe (891), interrupts the now-unified chorus with an off-stage scream of despair, *iō moi moi* (891: 'Alas me, alas me!'; repeated at 937). [19] Ajax had already screamed *iō moi moi* (333, 336) and Teucer will soon replicate it (974); thus all three actors are linked by the desperate fear and hopelessness which that scream symbolizes. [20] From her hidden vantage point near the stage-door, or perhaps a secondary stage-door Tecmessa announces that she's discovered Ajax's corpse in 'nearby thicket' (*napos*: 892). [21] The chorus finally sees her (894-5): "There she is! The young bride (*nymphē*), captive of his spear, Tecmessa, I see her. She's steeped in this cry of grief (*oiktos*)." The sight of her husband's bloody body stuns Tecmessa. "I am destroyed, devastated, totally demolished, friends!" (*oichōk', olōla*, *diapeporthēmai*: 896). The ascending tricolon of perfect tenses gives a more absolute sense of completeness than other tenses would. [22] And the "three synonymous verbs in asyndeton, each longer than the preceding (2, 3, 6 syllables) mark the intensification of Tecmessa's grief." [23] Indeed the last of those three verbs (*dia-portheō*) is almost always used for the sacking of cities and so registers Tecmessa's profound sense of devastation: '*Here he lies* (*hode…keitai*) wrapped around his *hidden / buried* (*kruph-aios*) sword' (899). At last the horrific revelation -- here lies his impaled body. The sword convicts him, making clear (*dēlon*) that he killed himself (*autos pros autou*, 906). This sword (*phasgonon*, 899, *enchos*, 907), fixed in the earth by Ajax, is "the quite special centre-piece of the ensuing lamentations…" [24] And, as W.B. Stanford observes, "we must try to imagine the deeply affecting tones of voice which actors would use in pronouncing words like *iō* and *ōmoi*, the effect of their sorrowful

[19] On Tecmessa's unusual entry at 891 see Taplin (1977) 385 n. 1.
[20] Taplin (1978) 109, 148-9.
[21] Liapis (2015) 147-54.
[22] Campbell (1881) at 896.
[23] Garvie (1998) at 896.
[24] Seale (1982) 167.

postures and gestures and the melancholy accompaniment of the flute [*aulos*]." [25] Ajax, as Sophocles' most unexpected master of ambiguity, has done exactly what he said he would do in his 'deception' speech, namely 'buried' his sword (*kruph-ō*, 658; *kruph-aios,* 899).

When the chorus begins to approach the stage area where Tecmessa has discovered the corpse (*pai pai keitai*…; 'Where, where does Ajax lie…?' 911-12) she immediately and emphatically stops them: 'He must not be *seen* (*theatos*)! *I will cover him* completely with this enfolding cloak since nobody, at least nobody who is a friend, could bear *to see* him.' (915-17). Just as Ajax's body has become a death-shroud enveloping his sword, so Tecmessa's cloak will become a death-shroud enveloping his corpse. Indeed it has been suggested that her words, '*I will cover him completely with this enfolding cloak*' (*periptychei / pharei kalypsō tōide pampēdēn*, 915-6), signal a significant stage-action here: "for if the cloak is held up in Tecmessa's outspread arms, a temporary curtain is created under cover of which the actor who plays Ajax, being already in the doorway, can make a quick exit. He can now be replaced by an effigy or a mute extra and have ample time to come back on a Teucer." [26] Such stagecraft could be easily and quickly accomplished and thereby enhance the possibility of an on-stage suicide while also avoiding more controversial staging scenarios such as rolling out the *ekkyklema* or having stage-hands bring out a screen. Nevertheless, in whatever way the stagecraft was actually managed, Sophocles has created a stunning thematic juxtaposition here, as Charles Segal notes: "The scene of the cloak visually concretizes the tragic distance between this rigid warrior and the woman who loves him. He has perished, as he wished, on his firmly fixed sword; all she can do is cover him in her softly enveloping cloak. Both the distance and the closeness between them are infinite; and the stage action catches them both in one of those large paradigmatic gestures characteristic of Greek poetry at its best." [27] To Segal's acute thematic observation we can add Lewis Campbell's visualization of Sophocles' on-stage death scene and Tecmessa's actions: "The sword-point lifts the garment of Ajax to an apex from which the folds descend. At 906 she has raised the edge of the garment, and is gazing at the mangled form beneath it. At 915, by a revulsion of feeling, she draws it (or perhaps

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[25] Stanford (1963) 177

[26] Mills (1980-81) 133, following Flickinger (1918) 244, 174; similarly Taplin (1978) 189 n. 5; Taplin (trans. 2015) 314; Liapis (2015) 147-8; contrast Heath / OKell (2007) 373-4; Finglass (2015) 206-8.

[27] Segal (1980) 129; cf. Segal (1981) 117: "Tecmessa's concealing [of Ajax's body] is an act of loving *philia* (cf. 917), whereas Ajax's concealing (658, 899) is an act which rejects *philoi*."

her own veil) over him so as to cover him more completely than before. The point of the sword is hidden by the garment, the blade in the body, the hilt in the ground." [28]

This visualization gets importantly supplemented a bit later when Teucer tells his attendant to uncover Ajax's corpse: '*Oimoi*. Come, you, lift off the covering (*ek-kalypson*) so that I may see the whole horror.' And when the attendant uncovers the corpse Teucer exclaims: '*O face hard-to-look-at* and full of bitter daring…' (*dys-theaton omma*, 1004; cf. *theatos*, 915). [29] What becomes immediately clear from the language of the text is that Ajax has fallen on his sword *face-upwards*. [30] This visualization flies in the face of a long iconographic tradition of Ajax falling *face-down* on his sword. But it does conspicuously recall the famous red-figure vase of the renowned Brygos Painter, c. 490 BCE, some 40-50 years *before* Sophocles' play (c. 450-440 BCE). [31] The interior of this cup shows Ajax impaled *face-upwards* on his sword and a woman covering his corpse with her cloak. Timothy Dugan writes provocatively about the Brygos cup painting and its relation to Sophocles' play: "…Tecmessa's cover-up is, in itself, an act of defiance and provocation for the slave-wife. Effectively…she asserts that Ajax will be buried quickly and honorably, his entrails will not be carrion for birds, predatory scavengers or the scorn of Agamemnon, Menelaus, or any of Ajax's detractors. And although the image of the grieving Tecmessa is mournful, the acquiescent, but slyly emancipated, slave-wife is a theatrical prototype for Antigone, Phaedra, and Iphigeneia, as well as antecedent to the Sophocles character 'Tecmessa'." [32]

The sight of the impaled bloody corpse overwhelms Tecmessa. "Alas, what am I going to do? (*oimoi*, *ti drasō*; 920; cf. 457, 809, 1024) Who of your *friends* will lift you up? Where is Teucer? If he should come, how timely he would arrive to *join in composing* (*syn-kat-harmosai*)

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[28] Campbell (1881) at 899; cf. Seale (1982) 167.

[29] On the ambiguities of 1004, esp. *dystheaton omma,* see Ferguson (1970) 22; Seale (1982) 169; Golder (1990) 33 n.19. At this point it would appear that Teucer and his attendant begin to extricate the sword from the Ajax 'dummy' in preparation for the upcoming suppliant tableau scene at 1168-84; see Mills (1980-81) 133-4; Taplin (1978) 87: 'the action [by Teucer at 1024 ff.] of drawing the sword from Ajax is the turning-point away from the low ebb of despair."

[30] Line 1004 pretty clearly seems to reveal that Ajax fell *backwards* on his sword, such that his face (*omma*) was looking *upwards*. This was noticed long ago by Thomas Mitchell (1844) *ad loc*.: "Teucer speaks, intently *gazing on his brother's face* [my italics], which is now uncovered." Similarly many subsequent scholars; e.g. Kamerbeek (1953), Stanford (1963); Golder (1990) 27; (1992) 356-7; (1999) 18; Lloyd-Jones (1994) 125; Garvie (1998) 93; Esposito (2010) 58; Finglass (2011) 424.

[31] The Brygos Painter kylix, dated c. 490 BCE (Getty Museum 86.AE.286) can be seen in an excellent large color photo in Finglass (*Omnibus* 2011) 27; cf. Catoni (2015) 22-24 and figures 13a-c; Davies (1973); Taplin (1978) figure 11 and note 11; Segal (1981) 117-8; March (1991-3) 6; Golder (1992) 356-8; Garvie (1998) 3 note 10 and 219; Shapiro (1994) 153-5; Esposito (2010) 58, note on 1004; Finglass (2011 commentary) 40; Dugan (2018) 57-59.

[32] Dugan (2018) 58.

his fallen brother here." (920-22). As J.C. Kamerbeek notes, "The first thing Tecmessa thinks of is the burial of Ajax. It must be performed by Teucer." [33] In the antistrophe she laments that the Greek commanders might well subject **her** and her young son to 'the yoke of slavery' (*douleias zyga*, 944; cf. 496-505). But when the chorus starts mentioning how Atreus' sons and 'much-enduring' (*poly-talas*) Odysseus are now surely mocking Ajax's misfortunes (*ep-hybrizei… gelai…gelōta*, 955-8), at that moment her anger and defiance ignite: "Well *let them mock* (*gelōntōn*), and *let them revel* (*kapichairontōn*) in this man's miseries! Perhaps now that he's dead, they'll lament his absence in the thick of battle….*So let Odysseus insolently abuse* (*hybrizetō*) the bereaved with his taunts!" For all that she is devastated by Ajax's suicide and the pain he has bequeathed her (*anias…goous*, 973), over the course of this lyric dialogue she's begun to work through her grief and find her former toughness, which culminates in the three strong imperatives of 961 and 971. Earlier on she had exhibited a similar determination in her riposte to Ajax (485-524); now she's regained her mettle.

Throughout this complex semi-lyrical antiphonal dirge (*threnōn*, 971) the grieving Tecmessa is demonstrably the driving force: she is the one who discovers her impaled husband, explains his suicide, covers his corpse with her cloak so he can't be viewed, asks where Teucer is, initiates the call for burial rites, confidently claims that Ajax's grandeur deserves to be lamented even by his enemies, predicts the enslavement of herself and her son to her new Greek taskmasters, explains Athena's malevolent role in her husband's demise (as a favor to Odysseus), and boldly defies the insolent mockery of Agamemnon, Menelaos and Odysseus.

All this embodies the process of Tecmessa's sadness-work – not only her final strophe and antistrophe but the preceding back-and-forth exchange between her and the chorus. This sadness-work is tellingly framed by her first and last verbs in the *kommos*, namely *oichōka* ('I am gone / destroyed,' 896) and *di-oichetai* ('he is completely gone / destroyed,' 973); this verb *oichomai* is often a euphemism for death (as at 743). I reiterate the apt remark of C.S. Lewis with which I began the essay:

> *For in **grief** nothing 'stays put.' One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats…I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but*

[33] Kamerbeek (1953) at 920; cf. Campbell (1881) *ad loc*.

*a history,…**Grief** is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape*."

So it is for Tecmessa: the *kommos* presents a miniature history of her griefwork. Just as the chorus begins each strophe and antistrophe with a ten-line unified lyric (879-90 = 925-36) so she concludes each strophe and antistrophe with two eight-line speeches (iambic trimeters) which respond metrically to one another, each resuming and developing a theme highlighted by the chorus (915-24; 961-73). As mentioned at the outset of this essay, these passages have long been controversial. But P.J. Finglass, following Nauck's lead in deleting 918-19 and 966-70, has put the text back on a more secure footing. Using Finglass's text I will translate the two stanzas in sequential order. It is good to see them back-to-back since they form the respective eight-line conclusions of the strophe and antistrophe of the *kommos*. [34]

Lines 915-24 (minus 918-19, which are probably spurious):

915 Mark me - he must not be *seen* (*outoi theatos*)! No, I will cover (*kalypsō*) him
916 completely with this enfolding cloak here (*peri-ptychei pharei tōide*),
917 since none who love him could stomach *to see* (*blepein*) him.
920 Alas, what shall I do (*oimoi*, *ti drasō*)? Who of your beloved will lift you?
921 Where is Teucer? How timely now would be his coming, if he should come, to join
922 the burial rites and compose the corpse (*syn-kath-armosai*) of his fallen brother here!
923 Alas ill-fated Ajax, from such a height are you now fallen so low --
924 how worthy (*axios*) you are to deserve dirges (*threnōn*) even from your enemies!

Lines 961-73 (minus 966-70, which are also probably spurious):

961 So let them [Atreus' sons] mock (*gelōntōn*), and let them revel in this man's ruin!
962 Even though they didn't desire him during his life,
963 perhaps in the stress of battle they'll lament his death.
964 For ignorant fools don't realize the good
965 they hold in their hands till they've thrown it away.
971 So let Odysseus abuse the bereaved (*en kenois*) with his insolent taunts (*hybris*)!
972 Since (*gar*) for those who are bereaved (*autois*) Ajax lives no longer, but for me
973 he's left behind anguish (*anias*) and lamentation (*goous*) by his dying (*di-oichetai*).

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[34] For the controversial text of Tecmessa's two speeches at 915-24 and 961-73 I use the text of Finglass 2009, reprinted in his 2011 commentary. Battezatto (2015) 240-41 is hesitant about deleting 918-19 but his objection is unpersuasive; Tecmessa's first words in the strophe are *outoi theatos* (915), emphatically indicating the *immediate* horror of the spectacle; there's no need to have two *subsequent* lines of gory detail. Cf. Heath (1987) 198 n. 68. Taplin (trans. 2015) 314 considers 971-3 weak and doubts their authenticity. I have suggested in my text above that they are excellent closing lines (not least because of the conspicuous ring composition of *oichōka,* 'I am gone / destroyed,' 896 and *di-oichetai*, 'he is completely gone / destroyed,' 973. For a useful discussion of 961-73 see A.C. Pearson (1922). After line 924 Finglass (2011 *ad loc*.) would have Tecmessa depart briefly behind the *skene* to cover Ajax's body. I don't share that opinion since I believe the corpse-covering occurs at 915-24.

It is important to remember that neither Tecmessa nor the chorus (the play's internal audience) heard Ajax's suicide speech nor saw it, as did we (the external audience). Even if we, the external audience, didn't see it on-stage (as some would argue) we certainly saw it *virtually*. Through Ajax's words (815-65) we come to feel his emotions and hear his reasoning – we get to 'read' his articulate, passionate and fierce 'suicide note.' Tecmessa got none of that; all she gets is the terrifying end result -- her husband's spiked corpse. We observe her grief first-hand. We hear her first off-stage screams – *io moi moi…io tlemon* (891, 893). Through her we almost get to be 'eye-witnesses' to the suicide a second time. But she demands that we not see the corpse -- "Mark me - he must not be seen!" (*outoi theatos*, 915).

As Tecmessa grieves, so we grieve; indeed because she grieves we can grieve. What Sophocles gives us is, in C.S. Lewis' words, 'a grief observed.' This is the cathartic work of tragedy, its gift to us -- the unloosening of the rage, the 'working through' of the sorrow and feelings of helplessness, the deep pain of a wife looking upon her husband impaled upon her enemy's sword, a deeply conflicted and flawed man whom she loved and tried desperately to save, and finally her defiance of his enemies. As C.S. Lewis says, "I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history." We hear and watch Tecmessa go through this process of devastation and defiance and we go through it with her vicariously.

It has been claimed that "Tekmessa is unique in tragedy in that she does not lament." Given our preceding argument I consider this judgment incorrect. Rather Sophocles shows her in the process of doing some serious sadness-work in the 80 or so lines of the *kommos* (since her entry at 891). After the *kommos* Tecmessa exits (973) and then returns at 1168, but she remains completely silent till the end of the play. Kirk Ormand wonders why: "What would be more natural than for Tekmessa to join in at 1223 [i.e. right after the third stasimon, 1185-1222] with a lament of her own? We have, therefore, every reason to expect some sort of formal lament for Ajax by Tecmessa, and it is little short of astounding that it never happens." [35] But there is no reason to

[35] Ormand (1996) 40; Foley (2001) 90, n. 164, correctly observes that "Tecmessa does in fact include most of the standard elements of wifely lament at 937-73, and hence the audience may not expect any further lament from her until Ajax' funeral takes place." Finglass (2011) 416 also comments on Ormand's argument: "if Tecmessa's silence was to have this significance, we might have expected attention to be drawn to it in some way." Cf. Wiersma (1984) 35 who aptly says of Tecmessa: "Accordingly she is in a position to stand aloof from the subsequent action without suggesting subordination. The poet has no reason to drag Tecmessa into participating in the coming rhetorical tilt

expect any more lamentation from her. She has expressed her feelings powerfully in the lyric dialogue, much more powerfully than a fuller and more formal lament because of the unpredictable rapid-fire pace of her to-and-fro with the chorus. Sophocles gives us something of a double-barreled 'formal' lament in her two eight-line metrically responding stanzas at 915-24 and 961-73. But there is no compelling theatrical or dramatic reason for any more spoken lamentation from Tecmessa. [36] Her *silent* lamentation, as she kneels beside the massive corpse of Ajax at center-stage, is much more powerful than more words could be. To be sure there's still some serious work to be done to secure Ajax's burial and reclamation of honor. That's why, after the third *kommos*, the plot moves from the private, domestic female arena to the public, political male arena. As Patricia Easterling notes, "Women have a place in the imaginative place of tragedy, but it is generally a place separate from the political sphere of the men…" [37] Tecmessa is silent henceforth because she has had her say; she went toe-to-toe in the ring with Ajax earlier on, and proved to be his toughest, most demanding opponent. [38] She threw some potent punches and Ajax felt their sting (e.g. *ethēlunthēn stoma / pros tēsde tēs gunaikos*, 'I have been softened like a woman in my speech because of this woman here': 651-2). Once he went missing, she became boss: she initiated the search for him, found his corpse, covered and protected it, and expressed concern for Teucer's whereabouts, for his extricating the sword and for his beginning the proper burial rituals. Then she scolded the Greek commanders and Athena's favoritism to Odysseus, and finally, in her last two lines (972-3), expressed the particular devastation caused by his death. At 973 her speaking role is over – she's spoken her 200 lines and fought the good fight – time to pass the baton. Now it's Teucer's turn – now he'll get his 200 lines to fight for Ajax's burial and honor. [39]

At Teucer's bidding Tecmessa departs (989) to fetch and protect Eurysaces from the enemy. After Teucer's 'funeral oration' over Ajax's body (992-1039) and his testy debate with Menelaus (1047-1162) Tecmessa reenters (1162) *in complete silence* (with attendants); Taplin

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(over Ajax' corpse!). Nor could she plausibly take part in Teucer's and Eurysaces' ritual dealings with the dead father and hero (1170ff, 1402 ff.), for the parallel scene 545 ff. was exclusively a matter between Ajax and his little son."

[36] Cf. Heath (1987) 198.

[37] Easterling (1987) 25.

[38] On Tecmessa's courageous confrontational monologue to Ajax at 485-524 see Easterling (1984) for fine analysis; cf. Sorum (1986) 368: "Tecmessa's claim is not simply a redefinition of a traditional idea from a woman's perspective. Rather it is a critique of the ethic espoused by Ajax…when it is removed from its heroic context."

[39] On some interesting parallelisms between Tecmessa's and Teucer's monologues (284-330 and 992-1039) see Hubbard (2003) 163-4.

observes that it's quite unusual for a major character to make a silent entry. [40] Tecmessa neither speaks nor is spoken to; but her silence will speak much more loudly than any words could as she now (1168-84) forms part of a suppliant tableau with Teucer and young Eury-saces, 'Wide-Shield.' The trio huddle around Ajax's corpse and perform a brief but powerful ritual of remembrance and ceremonial burial which creates something like a temporary sacred space for the family in mourning, an inviolable asylum where Ajax's corpse is seemingly "guarding its guardians" [41] just as much as the suppliants are "giving power to a lifeless body, a process that will accelerate through the final scene of the play." [42] As they offer locks of their hair to Ajax, their tender gathering around his massive body will serve as the unmoving pathetic backdrop for the angry debate between Teucer and Agamemnon (1223-1315). For the play's final 250 lines the woman who has by now become Ajax's legitimate wife (*gynē*) sits or kneels at center-stage beside her husband without saying a word; it may well be that Sophocles "intended her silent presence to serve as a symbol of passive grief and as a dumb [= silent] protest against the men's self-important language." [43]

[40] Taplin (1977) 284.
[41] Sommerstein (2015) 246; cf. Esposito (2010) note on 1168.
[42] Scott (1996) 91-92.
[43] Stanford (1963) 205.

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