

DRAMATIC DIALOGUE AND THE DIALOGICAL ENCOUNTERS  
ON THE ANCIENT GREEK STAGE

A variety of major and minor figures occupy the stage of Greek drama in a way that performers who contribute to the staging of a play are not virtually confined to the limited number of the three actors. This statement does not imply that the notorious "three-actor rule" of the antiquity can be contended with an enlarged theory which would advocate an unlimited cast of actors. Such an idea belongs to a modern perception of theatre-making where a different actor corresponds to each role so that a free number of actors as well as any availability in the combination of performers is allowed in a modern theatrical production. Accordingly, the conventional assumption of the use of the three actors in the Greek theatre is a factor which qualifies significantly the shaping of the dramatic dialogue and the staging of the play.

However, beyond this fundamental principle of Greek theatre, a wider range of performers were needed to act on the ancient Greek stage so that drama extended the possibilities of speech and action in the dialogical scenes of a theatrical production. At this point, I would suggest that mute performers in tragedies may also be considered as acting performers who operate in different levels of dramatic importance and may produce a considerable amount of impact in the shaping of the dialogue by their non-speaking presence. The present paper will discuss the shaping of the dramatic dialogue with particular reference to the combinations of the dialogical encounters between speaking actors, while taking into consideration that non-speaking parts have always been an important issue in the staging of the Greek plays. In this respect, the following argument owes a great deal to the theoretical analysis of dramatic dialogue inferred by Andrew K. Kennedy, who contends that "*a study of dialogue as verbal interaction - both existential and stylistic - can only benefit from any study of the non-verbal elements of drama which illuminates the total sign system of the theatre.*"<sup>1</sup>

The opening scenes in Sophocles' tragedies will be used as an example in order to illustrate the function of the dialogue between actors with different roles.<sup>2</sup> These references aim at the elaboration of the idea that there can be observed a design of dramatic dialogue in Greek drama, which bears affinities with other theatrical genres, but its structure is also highly conventional in the patterning of the dialogical encounters on the ancient Greek stage.

#### *Structural features and peculiarities of dramatic dialogue*

Before I proceed further with the dialogical encounters of the acting persons on the Greek stage, it would be appropriate to make some preliminary remarks for the structure of dialogue in its theatrical context. This reference is not virtually confined to the dramatic dialogue in the theatre of antiquity, but it might encompass the dialogical pattern of plays of different periods and dramatic genre.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A.K. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue. The Duologue of Personal Encounter*, Cambridge University Press 1983, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> "Dialogue occurs where roles meet", see M. Florin, B. Goranzon, P. Sällström, "The Concept of Dialogue" in

*New Directions in Theatre*, J. Hilton (ed.), Macmillan 1993, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> For the classification of plays into genres see J. Hilton, "Introduction" in *New Directions in Theatre* as above, p. 9ff.

In drama the complex overall design of the dialogical speeches is anticipated in the gradual presentation of each particular dialogue of a play by means of repeated patterns of words, phrases and verbal constructions. Each dialogue becomes part of the “cumulative” dialogue of the play<sup>4</sup> which builds up to the dramatic action and the whole network of dramatic language. As a whole the structure of a play is elaborated by the organization of the various styles of speeches which lead to the *shaping of the dialogue*; on the other side, the verbal complexities and various meanings of the individual speech contrive to the *texture of the dialogue*.<sup>5</sup> So the shaping and the texture of the dramatic dialogue refer both to the formalistic and semantic structure of dramatic speech and the small-scale stylistic features of dialogue. The subtle stylistic shifts of dialogue pass perhaps unnoticed by an audience that are normally more affected by the emotional impact rather than the formalistic construction of the play.<sup>6</sup> Normally, an audience or a reader of drama staying outside the zone of dramatic speech is allowed to share with the characters a common acquaintance with the plot and even more than that, to have a better understanding of the situation than the characters themselves. So the latter may be involved in a situation that concerns them and yet be unable to see clearly the “full significance of the total situation”.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be the marking point where *dramatic irony* emerges in the language of the dramatic dialogue.

Moreover, the dramatic dialogue conjures up an interruption of its continuity in speech when it sounds *non-coherent* to the speakers of the play, while, on the other side, this non-coherent speech may be quite intelligible for the audience that can follow the *coherence of the dialogue* of the entire play. In some sense, it is characteristic the example of Cassandra’s reactions in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. Her incomprehensible silence, cries and inarticulate speech sound incoherent to Clytaemnestra and the Chorus, but the audience knowing the context of the myth have no difficulty in following coherently her reactions.<sup>8</sup> The point here is that the non-coherent speech of a character does not allow him to “enter into a dialogue” with the other persons on the same stage.<sup>9</sup> However communication is restored when the scene continues with an iambic dialogue between Cassandra and the Chorus where the prophetess tries to explain the meaning of her incomprehensible behaviour.<sup>10</sup> In the second part of the scene Cassandra’s words become coherent and seize with fear the sentiments of the Chorus. Despite the fact that the dialogue continues without distortions of utterance, the Chorus are still unable to believe Cassandra’s prophetic warnings and she remains a lonely speaking character in the play.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Kennedy, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup>Kennedy, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>K. George, *Rhythm in Drama*, University of Pittsburg Press 1980, p. 62.

<sup>7</sup>T. Van Laan, *The Idiom of Drama*, Ithaca & New York 1970, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Cp. lines 1035-1177. For Cassandra’s body “language” see K. Valakas, “The Use of Body by Actors in Tragedy and Satyr-Play” in *Greek and Roman Actors. Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, P. Easterling & E. Hall (eds), Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 69-92, esp. 80-1: “The audience, [...] are unable to resist Cassandra’s disarming truth and agitation”. Possibly the audience experience the dramatic tension between Cassandra’s raving on stage and their mythical knowledge of the

impending danger upon the house of Atreus, a knowledge which they are not supposed to share with the Chorus and Clytaemnestra on the level of the dramatic action.

<sup>9</sup>Kennedy, op.cit., p. 17 classifies Cassandra’s dramatic part as one of those “classics of dislocation” in dialogue; see also pp. 18-19 for other examples of *non-coherent dialogue* in Shakespeare, Büchner and Pinter.

<sup>10</sup>Cp. *Agamemnon* 1178-1330.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Lukács, “The Sociology of Modern Drama”, in *The Theory of the Modern Stage*, E. Bentley (ed.), Harmondsworth 1968 repr., pp. 423-450 for Hamlet’s dislocation in dialogue and relationship, esp. 443: “The more lonely men in drama become [...] the more dialogue will become fragmented, allusive, impressionistic in form than specific and forthright.”

Dramatic dialogue concentrates a rhythmical movement by the *alternation of speech* from one speaker to another and by the *length of speeches* that develop a progression of the action on the temporal level. Characters who tend to face each other and to respond to speech with speech seem to keep a *positive attitude* in the dialogue. On the contrary, characters who avoid the dialogue and turn away from the other speaker seeking a silent position seem to express a *negative attitude* in the dialogue. In the design of the dialogical speeches the shift from one attitude to another follows parallel ways with the change in the speaker's mind so that actions and moods proceed in repetitive contrasts. In other words, the distinction between *positive and negative attitudes in dialogue* brings very close the concept of a *speech rhythm* which might occasionally turn to be "speech beyond dialogue." This means that a face-to-face dialogue is minimal in the structure of dramatic speech and becomes less personal in the interaction of the characters. In Greek drama this practice of speech beyond dialogue is qualified by the long narratives, monologues and the lyric odes.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the meaning of drama is not only conceived as an interaction between the dramatic characters, but also as the *interaction between verbal and non-verbal elements* of the play which both contribute to the shaping of the dialogue.<sup>13</sup> In the space between these antithetical elements of the dialogical encounter, the dramatic dialogue proceeds with attempts from a limited to a more enlarged area of communication, or the other way round. This idea alludes to the notion of an inner movement of dramatic language which tends "from explicit statement to implication, suggestion, minimal speech".<sup>14</sup> In the modern theatre this tendency leads up to the point of the extinction of the word as the main factor in the development of the action. Then, the events on the stage are intimated as visual scenes in space with "possibilities of extension beyond words", a rather modern theatrical practice which creates the idea of the "wordless drama".<sup>15</sup>

To sum up so far the argument advanced, a first account of the dialogical structure of a play would be the consideration of the elements which control the shaping and the texture of the dialogue. These elements suggest the idea of a *rhythm in dialogue* which exists in the *balance of personal and temporal interplay*. This statement entails that the alternation pattern between the speakers defines the length of speeches in the temporal level of dramatic dialogue.<sup>16</sup> On the other side, the communication between the characters can be distracted by the dislocation of dialogue with negative attitudes such as non-coherent speech, avoidance of dialogue-

<sup>12</sup> According to Kennedy, op.cit., pp. 37-39, the most representative example of "speech beyond dialogue" in the Greek theatre is the *Oresteia* plays. He maintains that in these plays the speech alternates between a single speaker (e.g. the Watchman in the prologue or Clytemnestra in the first episode of *Agamemnon*), that Agamemnon utters lines in isolation on his first entry, and that Electra and Orestes do not address each other at all in the face-to-face dialogue in the Recognition scene of the *Choephoroi*; see also George op. cit., pp. 82-85 for the rhythm in dialogue as a continuity of positive and negative attitudes.

<sup>13</sup> "Interaction between word and non-word"; cf. Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language. Studies in Dramatic Language*, Cambridge University Press 1972, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, op.cit., p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> A. Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son Double*, Gallimard 1964, p. 53f. Beckett's plays are probably the most representative case of making "wordless drama", in which even his famous pauses become vehemence of dramatic meaning; cf. Waiting for Godot, Krapp's Last Tape, Happy Days. See Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*, op.cit., p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> George, op.cit., p. 62. See also M. Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, English transl., Cambridge University Press 1993 repr., p. 144: "The temporal arrangement of the various speeches or utterances and dialogues normally takes the form of a succession, a linear series of individual utterances and dialogues."



involvement and minimal speech to the extinction of the word. All these attitudes are parts of the *distorted aspects of the dramatic dialogue* which affect more or less overtly the communication between the characters of a play.

Finally, we have to take into account the implications of another important factor in the distribution of the speaking parts which affects the dramatic speech in its limited or enlarged form of communication. This is that the speech of an individualized character in drama has a different meaning from the speech of the functional figure who, whether as a Messenger or a Chorus, commands a more or less restricted area of informative action rather than of dramatic action. A dramatic character defines the facts of the plot and his statements are part of the design of the dramatic dialogue. In contrast, a functional figure is less involved in the action and his language of "expository statement" passes information necessary for the understanding of the dramatic facts.<sup>17</sup> So the appearance of the speaking persons in drama is also related to the fact of their contribution to the dramatic action or to their observation and announcement of the events.<sup>18</sup>

### *The dialogical encounters in Greek drama*

Usually, an ancient Greek play elicits attention to the spoken word. Non-speaking actors are veiled in their indistinguishable silence, but we can easily distinguish the speakers if we come in contact with a play as readers. However, stage-managers have to search carefully in order to expose in front of the spectators all the existing elements that are hidden behind the lines of the text. As it is well known, dramatic texts have been transferred without any stage directions written separately by the playwrights, so that a great degree of speculation and uncertainty is left about the "dumb elements" of the plays. By the term "dumb element" I signify the lack of information about a number of mutes and their stage-action, the visual arrangement of speakers, the use of stage machinery, the setting of the scenes. All these elements seem to be irretrievably lost in the spectacle of the first production of the plays.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, apart from eventual ambiguities in their content, dramatic texts are also ambiguous in giving precise clues as to how they might have been staged and conceived in the performance of the antiquity. In consequence, the limited information about the staging of the Greek plays becomes the source of a great trouble for those theatremakers who are ambitious to keep a certain degree of accuracy in the ancient perception of theatre-making.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, these texts by themselves abound in stage directions implicit in the words of the speakers. A careful reading of the plays can positively illuminate many dark aspects in the understanding of the

<sup>17</sup>Euripides' prologues and the informative speech in the Messenger-scenes are examples of the "expository statement" in Greek drama. See also J.M. Bremer, "Why Messenger-Speeches?" in *Miscellanea Tragica in Honorem J.C. Kamerbeek*, Amsterdam 1976, pp. 29-48 who also points to the fact that in Sophocles some messenger-speeches are "dissolved" into dialogue, even into "Dreigespräch." (p.45).

<sup>18</sup>Van Laan, op.cit., pp. 10-20.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Artaud, op.cit., p. 163: "C" est que le coté directement humain et agissant d' une diction, d' une gesticulation, de

tout un rythme scénique nous échappe."

<sup>20</sup>Accuracy with the spirit of the text could be one method of approach to the Greek drama but, on the other side, *improvisation* is a fundamental principle of performance of the Greek plays, "even when based on an existing text". See Hilton, op.cit., p. 11. For the reasons of "a contemporary director to turn to Greek tragedy" see E. Arvaniti, *The Representation of Women in Contemporary Productions of Greek Tragedies based on the Myth of Orestes*, Ph. D. thesis, University of Kent 1996, pp. 19-28.

scenes and the movement of the action.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, dramatic speech remains the focal point in the study of Greek drama in order to distinguish between the vocal performances in the plays and the unspoken parts in the hints of the text.

The assignment of three actors to each play signifies that the structure of the scenes was based on a repeated pattern of speeches which is distributed between three speakers. According to this pattern, the playwrights shaped the dialogical encounters in their plays with three actors who played all the roles of the plays.<sup>22</sup> Historically speaking, the introduction of the second actor by Aeschylus and, later, the third by Sophocles gave predominance to the dialogue over the speeches of drama and enlarged the possibilities of interaction between the characters of the play. As a result, drama developed from the "monodrama" of Thespis to the "speeches which become verbal actions"<sup>23</sup> in the more simple plots of Aeschylus and then to the more complicated plots of Sophocles with a succession of episodes and a complexity of characters. Alongside with speaking actors, the playwrights exploited a free choice of mute performers with a considerable gamut of histrionic interpretations in relevance with the roles they were assigned to perform.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in Greek drama, dialogues occur either in two-actor scenes or in scenes with all three actors on stage. We can assume mutes or attendants to stand up nearby, if appropriate indications in the text show their existence.<sup>25</sup> However, the perspective of the staging changes considerably when the third actor steps in and becomes the third speaker. At this very moment the impact of a dialogue between two speakers shifts to a more enlarged area of dialogical possibilities between three speakers. All the same, it is very rare that in triangular scenes the three speakers interlock in a tightly three-cornered dialogue. The distribution of the speaking parts among the three actors in such a way that each time one of them remains silent supplies the evidence that the three actors rarely converse together on the stage.<sup>26</sup> This comes up as a conventional assumption of the Greek theatre that as long as the two speakers exchange words, the third person remains a silent bystander, until the moment that, by the shift of the dialogue, he establishes contact with one of them. Obviously, the shift of the dialogue from one speaker to

<sup>21</sup> See G. Chancellor, "Implicit Stage directions in Ancient Greek Drama. Critical Assumptions and the Reading Public" *Arethusa*, vol. 12, 1979, pp. 133-152. For a more theoretical approach see Pfister, op.cit., pp. 13-16 who classifies explicit stage-directions in secondary texts, and implicit stage-directions in primary texts.

<sup>22</sup> For an aesthetic explanation of the three-actor rule in tragedy see G.M. Sifakis, "The One-Actor Rule in Greek Tragedy" in *Stage Directions. Essays in Ancient Drama in honour of E.W. Handley*, A. Griffiths (ed.) *BICS*, 1995, pp. 13-24.

<sup>23</sup> E. Olson, *Tragedy and the Theory of Drama*, Detroit 1961, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> See also B. Gredley, "Greek Tragedy and the Discovery of the Actor" in *Drama and the Actor. Themes in Drama*, J. Redmond (ed.), vol. 6, Cambridge 1984, pp. 1-14 who argues that the presence of mute performers does not mean that they were in the plays to solve occasional technical difficulties, but they were an integral part of the

development of the scene.

<sup>25</sup> Valakas, op.cit., p. 72 speaks about "the idea of a large-group performance" in scenes with speakers, mutes and the chorus in which "the play entails continuous interaction between numerous performers". Cf. below the prologues of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Philoctetes* with a different use of speaking and non-speaking actors on stage, of course without the presence of the Chorus.

<sup>26</sup> The shining exceptions in Sophocles' plays last only for a few lines and they apply to a short scene in *Oedipus Tyrannus* between Oedipus, Iocasta and Creon (634-648), two longer stichomythic parts in the dialogues between Iocasta, the Messenger and Oedipus (950-988), and between the Servant, the Messenger and Oedipus (1130-1150), and a short scene between Creon, Antigone and Ismene in *Antigone* (531-539). Cf. A.A. Maggel, *Silence in Sophocles' Tragedies*, Ph. D. thesis, University College London 1997, pp. 21-22.

another is not merely an interactive mechanism in the composition of dramatic speeches.<sup>27</sup> The verbal exchanges in the dialogical encounters also embody an *interchange of values* between the interlocutors. In this sense, there is an immediate relation between the *existential* and the *stylistic* aspects of the dramatic dialogue which implies an exchange of personal worlds.<sup>28</sup>

The *alternation of speakers* which brings forth the *rhythm of dialogue* in drama, not only determines the interactive communication between speaking characters. It also marks the intensity of their involvement in the verbal as well as the non-verbal activity of the play. As a result, silent (or even mute) actors in a dialogical encounter are liable to determine the flow and the meaning of the dialogue by their non-speaking activity in the scene.

*A paradigm: The dialogical encounters in the opening scenes of Sophocles' plays.*

The prologues in Sophoclean drama are typical of a dramaturgy which introduces two actors, or three actors in successive stages who take part in a combination of speeches between them. Sophocles nowhere in his extant plays begins with immediate dialogue, but he rather makes a longer speech or set of speeches precede a dialogue.<sup>29</sup> This technique is different in Comedy where Aristophanes starts his plays by plunging them immediately in open dialogue, and it is, moreover, unlike the long Euripidean monologues which give necessary information at the outset of the plays.<sup>30</sup> In Sophocles' plays the same sort of information passes through the form of dramatic dialogue consisting of longer or shorter speeches between two speakers.

The smallest unit of interactive dialogue is reflected in the highly formalistic pattern of stichomythia with symmetrical exchanges in a line-by-line alternation of speech between two speakers. The formality of stichomythic dialogue gives a degree of abstraction in the dialogical encounters in Greek drama and it is analogous to the stylized convention of a law-court cross-examination. Sophocles loosened the severity of stichomythic structure as it was in Aeschylus and Euripides, and gave a much more personal tone in the use of a free dialogue interspersed with stichomythic lines.<sup>31</sup> All extant Sophoclean plays include stichomythic dialogues in their prologues with the exception of *Electra* that presents a prologue with monological speeches.<sup>32</sup>

In particular, there are plays which start with two speakers like *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*,

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Maggel op.cit., pp. 28-32 for the "mechanism which generates [...] the transition of speech from one speaker to another."

<sup>28</sup> See Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue* op.cit., pp. 19-21.

<sup>29</sup> For the importance of the prologue as a separate section of the play see C. P. Segal, "Tragic Beginnings: Narration, Voice, and Authority in the Prologues of Greek Drama" *YCS, Beginnings in Classical Literature*, Cambridge University Press, vol. 29, 1992, pp. 85-112. Cf. also Aristophanes *Frogs* 1120 τὸ πρῶτον τῆς τραγωδίας μέρος and Aristotle *Poetics* 12.1452b 19.

<sup>30</sup> A different method for the presentation of the prologue seems to have been used by Aeschylus who introduced a leading character in a long-standing silence before he speaks in the opening scenes of his plays. Cp.

Aristophanes *Frogs* 911- 926. The closest analogy with the manner of a Sophoclean prologue is the opening scene of *Prometheus Bound* with three actors -Kratos, Hephaestus, Prometheus- and a mute -Bia- on stage, but in the second part of the prologue Prometheus remains alone and delivers a monologue.

<sup>31</sup> C. Collard, "On Stichomythia" *LCM*, vol. 5, n. 4, 1980, pp. 80-81. Cf. Kennedy, *Dramatic Dialogue*, op.cit., pp. 39-41.

<sup>32</sup> The example of *Electra* does not suggest that these monologues are detached from the dialogical context of the prologue. They would rather be described as "monological dialogues" in which individual utterances are longer and provide a "unified semantic direction". Pfister, op.cit., p. 128.



and plays which start with three speakers like *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. *Antigone's* opening scene introduces Antigone already engaged in a conspiratorial dialogue with Ismene, who is reluctant to follow her sister's plans. In the opening scene of *Philoctetes* Odysseus uses a long informative speech where he displays to Neoptolemus (and the audience) the location of the scenery in Lemnos and a short history of past events. The presence of a mute performer in the escort of Odysseus is spotted in the prologue because he is to play an important part in the plot, when he comes back as a speaking actor to promote Odysseus' deceptive plans in the Merchant-scene (542-627). These prologues with two actors on stage explore different purposes in the shaping of the dialogue. In *Antigone* an undisrupted two-way communication between the sisters "involves the audience at once in the dramatic situation through dialogue", whereas *Philoctetes* necessitates an "explanatory prologue" and a dialogue with longer set speeches for the deception plot and the use of the disguised merchant in the later scene.<sup>33</sup>

*Electra* seems to fall into a different category of prologue because at the end of the two long rheseis made by the Paedagogus and Orestes, *Electra* is heard to lament from inside the palace, but the two men precipitate their departure from the stage, thus cancelling the plausibility of a three-actor encounter. Presumably, this example counts as a two-actor rather than a three-actor prologue, and the feeling is that this dialogical encounter aimed at producing set speeches rather than an immediate dialogue-contact.<sup>34</sup>

The staging of the prologue in *Ajax* seems to offer a paradox of speech and sight when it produces a dramatic illusion for the audience, who are urged to register Odysseus' invisibility, though he is completely in view, as part of Athena's contrivance to forward the entrance of the insane Ajax. Invisibility and speechlessness are linked together and prepared in the words of the prologue as dramatic devices which affect the shaping of the dialogue between the three acting persons. In this prologue, dramatic speech can run normally between Athena and Odysseus, but the dialogue is obviously altered when Odysseus is pushed into a silent role sustained by his invisibility, which make him unapproachable to Ajax.<sup>35</sup>

The prologues of *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, staged in their second parts with all three actors in full view, designate a different stage in the development of the dramatic technique at the very beginning of the plays. Precisely, the prologue of *O.T.* makes a clear distinction between a first scene with two actors and a second scene with three actors. In the two-actor scene Oedipus and the Priest of Thebes converse in the presence of a group of suppliants. By the entrance of a third speaker who is Creon, the scene turns to a three-actor dialogical encounter in which, Oedipus and Creon converse and the Priest attends silently the conversation together with the crowd of suppliants. The Priest restores to the dialogue with parting words that set in motion the delegation of the city. The opening scene of *O.T.* is an impressive staging of three actors in alternate dialogues and a mute crowd to provide a tableau of supplication with their physical presence in the background of the verbal actions.<sup>36</sup>

The prologue in *Trachiniae* is another typical example of a three-actor scene in which the entrance of the third speaker, who is Deianeira's son Hyllus, makes one of the speakers, that is the Nurse, fall silent. What makes the difference here is the opening speech by Deianeira

<sup>33</sup> Segal, op.cit., pp. 103, 106.

<sup>34</sup> See also Segal, op.cit., p. 105: "Electra has the longest stretch of set speeches in a Sophoclean prologue [...]" and

the least amount of dialogue".

<sup>35</sup> Maggel, op.cit., pp. 186-195.

<sup>36</sup> Maggel, op.cit., pp. 135-141.

which bears similarities with the Euripidean introductory monologues, though it seems that Deianeira has an addressee who is the Nurse.<sup>37</sup> This long speech provides information about the past and present sufferings of Deianeira and it is followed by a short speech of the Nurse who comes up with advice for her mistress. Deianeira does not enter into dialogue-contact with the Nurse though she listens carefully her admonition. Instead, her son Hyllus becomes the third party of the company at his entrance, and both mother and son indulge into a short dialogue, while the Nurse remains a silent bystander detached from the dialogue. The example differs from the prologue of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in the matter of communication between the three speakers. While Oedipus responded to the appeals of the Priest and Creon, Deianeira seems to avoid communication with the Nurse. When Deianeira turns to her son without answering back the Nurse, the latter's role is restricted to a minor figure of the play with a limited scope of involvement, at least at this point of the action.<sup>38</sup>

In the opposite, Antigone's role is prominent in the opening scene of *Oedipus at Colonus*, a play that begins and finishes with two speeches by Oedipus, and a sequence of dialogical encounters between Oedipus and Antigone, and Oedipus and the Stranger. Father and daughter are in constant communication while Antigone guides the blind Oedipus' steps and words in the grove of Eumenides at Colonus. Then Antigone announces the arrival of the Colonean Stranger and urges her father to enter in dialogue with him. After that, Antigone remains a silent bystander who follows carefully this encounter, but she is totally excluded from the dialogue between Oedipus and the Stranger. Her dislocation from the dialogue persists even after the departure of the Stranger and she is only drawn back to speech after Oedipus asks her whether the Stranger has left.<sup>39</sup>

What does all this mean for the shaping of the dialogue in the opening scenes of Sophocles' plays? The contact between the speakers is made obvious in the degree of their involvement with the dialogue. In the *Antigone* play, Antigone and Ismene face each other and converse together in a close dialogue-contact. Specially, Odysseus and Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* advance the dialogue between them without disruptions. At the entrance of a third character the dialogue shifts to a new pair of speakers who tend to exclude the third speaker from entering into dialogue-contact with the two interlocutors, like Odysseus in the dialogue of Athena and Ajax in *Ajax*, the Nurse in the dialogue of Deianeira and Hyllus in *Trachiniae*, and Antigone in the dialogue of Oedipus and the Stranger in *O.C.* In fact what happens in these scenes is that the dialogical encounters between the three actors on stage produce sets of dialogues in alternate duologues.<sup>40</sup> This pattern is analogous with the dialogical encounters in the prologue of *O.T.*, but the difference here relies to the fact that Oedipus urges contact with the Priest as much as with Creon so that the three actors communicate in close interaction. On the contrary in the prologue of *Ajax*, Odysseus averts a dialogue-contact with Ajax and remains in his silent witnessing of his opponent's

<sup>37</sup> For the staging problems of this prologue see the discussion in Maggel, op.cit., pp. 179-185.

<sup>38</sup> Cp. her role in the dialogical part with the Chorus at 871ff. and her speech about Deianeira's death at 899ff. See also Maggel, op.cit., pp. 179-185.

<sup>39</sup> Maggel, op.cit., pp. 196-203.

<sup>40</sup> Pfister, op.cit., p. 141 distinguishes between duologues (dialogues between two figures) and polylogues (dialogues between three or more figures) in the quantitative division of dialogues; he also notes that

"polylogues are potentially of a more complex semantic structure than duologues". Dialogues in Greek tragedy are mostly characterized as duologues, that is dialogical encounters between two speakers, but the presence of the third speaker who remains outside the speaking activity, while waiting for his turn to speak at an appropriate moment, provides a dynamic dimension in the communicative interaction between the three speaking actors on stage.



madness. In *Trachiniae*, Deianeira, preoccupied with her inner thoughts and fears, abstains from a dialogue-contact with her servant, though she comments that the Nurse has spoken like a free person (61-63). And Antigone in the prologue of *O.C.* defines her role as a guide of Oedipus' blindness, while she abstains from a dialogue-contact with the Stranger of Colonus.

### *Final remarks*

In the beginning of this paper I attempted to trace some basic elements in the structure of dramatic dialogue in relation with the peculiarities of dialogical speech that affect the degree of communicability between speakers in the theatrical space. Fragmented speeches, abstention from dialogue, minimalizing of the spoken word in favor of visual scenes have all been discussed as major disruptions in the shaping and the texture of the dramatic dialogue. In this paper, I have also drawn attention to the disruptions in the sequence of the dialogue implied by the use of the three actors on the ancient Greek stage. In the opening scenes of Sophocles' plays the interruptions of dialogue are associated with the intervention of a third speaker and the avoidance of dialogue-contact between pairs of speakers.

Interruptions of dialogue and silent attitudes deviate dramatic dialogue from an alert relationship between individuals. The frequency of these incidents in the rhythm of dialogue seems to be much more extensive in the practice of modern theatre than in Greek drama which was less experimental than it was conventional.<sup>41</sup> It is a matter of further discussion to explore the question as to what extent the highly conventionalized Greek drama permitted the experimentation with peculiar forms of dramatic dialogue such as those described above that can be found in the modern theatre.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. D.J. Mastronarde, "Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage", *CalUnivPublicist*, vol. 21, Berkeley, California 1979, p. 3: "In Greek tragedy, however, the

major and minor discontinuities raise the question of how much flexibility and disorder was permitted in what was, at heart, a formal and decorous genre."