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Signs in Sophocles: Modern Approaches to PTSD in the Ajax

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Signs in Sophocles: Modern Approaches to PTSD in the *Ajax*

by

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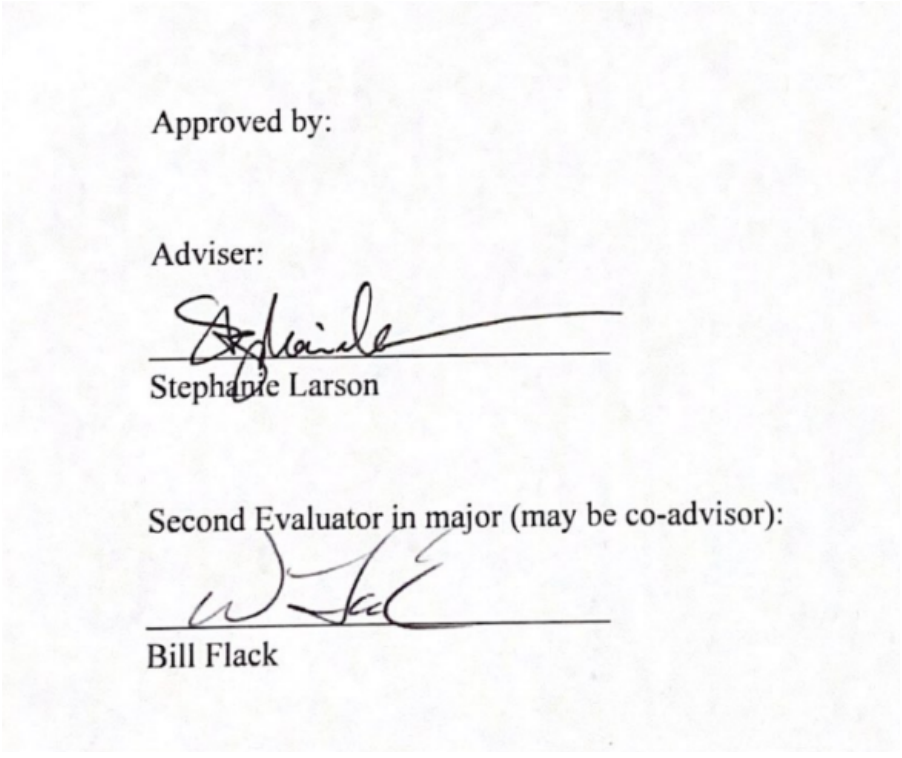

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Abstract

This project explores the relationship between ancient Greek tragedy and modern psychology, specifically focusing on instances of PTSD, both through the descriptions of symptoms and the cultural reaction to such trauma responses in both ancient and modern sources. The case study from ancient Greece is Sophocles' play, *Ajax,* a dramatic depiction of a post-PTSD soldier who has a mental break and is faced with either living with what he has done or committing suicide. The primary objective of this project is to illustrate what modern psychological theory can reveal about the portrayal of PTSD in Greek tragedy and therefore also what we can learn about the understanding of PTSD in 5th-century BCE Athens through my new translation of selections from the play. Though the manner in which wars are fought has drastically changed since 450 BCE, the findings demonstrate that the experience of combat trauma and the challenges of homecoming seem to transcend time.

Introduction

This project explores the relationship between ancient Greek tragedy and modern psychology, specifically focusing on instances of PTSD, both through the descriptions of symptoms and the cultural reaction to such trauma responses in both ancient and modern sources. I focus on Sophocles' play, *Ajax,* as a primary case study. This tragedy provides a dramatic depiction of a post-PTSD soldier who has gone berserk and is faced with either living with what he has done or committing suicide. The primary objective of this project is to illustrate what modern psychological theory can reveal about the portrayal of PTSD in Greek tragedy and therefore what we can learn about the understanding of PTSD in 5th-century BCE Athens. Further, if we can draw continuity between ancient and modern times, then with this cross-chronological comparison, we can also open the door for modern soldiers to understand that they are not and have never been alone: rather, there is some unity in experience of military trauma across time.

In order to complete this study, I begin with a review of modern psychological research on PTSD. For the sake of this thesis, my primary focus is PTSD in relation to veterans and active-duty soldiers, though I may mention other trauma victims on occasion when relevant. In addition to a general overview of the history of PTSD and its numerous forms and descriptions over time, I will also compile more specific research regarding PTSD and recent wars. This research includes the reception of soldiers post-trauma and the importance of community support when it comes to healing and reintegration of veterans with PTSD. In this section, I will also highlight the most common symptoms of PTSD since I will refer back to these symptoms in my later discussions.

In my second chapter, I highlight several significant passages from the *Ajax*, both in the original ancient Greek and in my own modern English translations. I have selected these passages because of their depictions of a soldier suffering from mental illness, to the reactions of those around him, and to the symptoms themselves that are described in the play. In this chapter, I set each passage side-by-side with a display of the original text and my own translations of it. These translations draw upon other reputable prior translations, in addition to including my own deliberate word choices, and I shall describe my translation process in further detail in that chapter.

Instead of ascribing Ajax's abnormal symptoms as interference from a deity, I contend that his symptoms may be attributed to PTSD and that by analyzing the play through a modern understanding of the psychology of PTSD, we may better approach ancient Athenian understanding of the condition. Because Greek tragedy played a central role in ancient Athenian society, the symptoms described in the play were not simply concocted *ex nihilo* but rather most likely drew from the real, lived experiences of soldiers within that society. It is worth noting that Sophocles, the author of the tragedy, was a military general, and as such would have had extensive experience with combat and dealing with soldiers during and in the aftermath of trauma. In addition, the reactions of the characters in the *Ajax* to his plight may reveal societal and cultural norms about soldiers who returned from battle alive but suffered psychological after-effects of trauma.

In the past, historians have often explored the relationship between ancient literature and culture in general, and the existence of PTSD has not gone unnoticed. Many cogent arguments have been made for PTSD being apparent in the *Iliad,* for example, perhaps the most well-known text from Greek antiquity. Jonathan Shay's 1994 *Achilles in Vietnam* reveals connections

between Achilles' behavior and those of more modern soldiers returning from war. Modern scholars have similarly analyzed Sophocles' *Ajax.* The conversation has mostly focused on Ajax's suicide, however. In the third chapter, I review what other scholars have written about the play and PTSD in ancient societies more generally.

After exploring the literature regarding both PTSD and the *Ajax,* in the fourth chapter I present my own thoughts on this topic. There I focus on the symptomatology related to PTSD that is revealed far earlier in the play than the actual moment of Ajax's suicide. I additionally highlight previously overlooked or underemphasized sections regarding PTSD symptoms that may also further illuminate the nuances of Sophocles' understanding of PTSD. I hope that my study will help reveal with even more clarity the continuity of the plight of soldiers returning from war and the manner in which their communities receive them across time, space, and culture.

Chapter 1: A History of Views on PTSD from Hippocrates to Today

History of Trauma

Trauma is an experience that is defined both objectively and subjectively by those that experience it and those that are merely observers of the aftermath, such as psychologists and loved ones. As a condition that specifically addresses the results of a trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been a topic of debate in the field of Psychology ever since its introduction in the third edition of the DSM. Yet, years before the DSM ever existed, the combination of symptoms that I now call PTSD still existed. The identification of this condition has remained ephemeral for centuries: nostalgia, soldier's heart, shell shock, battle fatigue and finally the modern acronym PTSD to name just a few. In what follows, I conduct a review of both historical understandings of PTSD and modern psychological research on the condition.

Classical Period

Although the modern concept of PTSD did not exist in the classical period, several ancient Greek physicians were interested in mental illness, including Hippocrates. Along with his disciples, Hippocrates put together the *Hippocratic Corpus,* which promoted the systematic study of clinical medicine along with establishing standard good practices for physicians at that time.[1] He was the first to recognize different types of mental illnesses using terminology that has continued to the modern day (i.e. melancholy, phrenitis, mania, paranoia, panic, epilepsy, and hysteria).[2] In particular, physicians during that time believed that epilepsy was brought on by the gods; epilepsy was considered a mental illness as a result of divine intervention.[3] The other most applicable category to my own research is that of mania, a Greek term and concept that I will

[1] Kalachanis, 2011
[2] Kleisiaris et al. 2014
[3] A belief mirrored at face value in the *Ajax,* as will be discussed further in Chapter 2

discuss at length in Chapter 2. Despite these classifications, physicians during the classical period also frequently depended upon the framework of the four humors to describe human temperament. Under this framework, each of the four humors (yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood) correspond with various elements, organs, and temperamental characteristics.[4] Deviation from the proper balance of these humors was believed to cause the symptoms now recognized to be signs of mental illness.

While there is a large gap in time between the classical period and the following sections, the American Civil War marked the beginning of our modern American conceptions of PTSD and as such it is the most fruitful place to begin a more in depth study of the topic.

The Civil War

With the Civil War came a flood of soldiers suffering from 'Soldier's Heart.' Unlike the previous considerations of similar conditions coming from a 'feeble will' or underlying weakness, Soldier's Heart was considered to be more of a physiological condition.[5] In particular, Dr. Da Costa, a physician who worked with veterans after the Civil War, found that those afflicted often had heart palpitations, difficulty breathing and other cardiovascular related issues, many of which are now known to be the physical effects of a panic attack.[6] The condition that they believed was caused by overstimulating the heart was therefore dubbed 'Soldier's Heart,' in addition to the lesser used 'Irritable Heart' and 'Da Costa's Syndrome.'[7]

It should also be noted that during this time period, similar symptoms began to be noticed in survivors of train crashes. Once again showing belief in a physiological cause of these

[4] Hippocrates, n.d., Tsagkaris & Kalachanis 2020, 33-37
[5] Committee on the Assessment of Ongoing Effects in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, 2012
[6] Friedman, 2018
[7] Committee on the Assessment of Ongoing Effects in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, 2012

symptoms, those afflicted were considered to have 'Railway Spine' or 'Railway Brain.'[8] This characterization is an important aspect of the evolution of the consideration of the symptoms, since the symptomology not only shows the belief in a physical cause of the symptoms but also that victims of other types of trauma (not just soldiers in combat) were recorded as suffering from similar afflictions.

WWI

In the early days of WWI, military doctors also began to notice the impact of combat experience on soldiers. Soldiers would appear detached from their surroundings, suffer amnesia, become blind or deaf (with no physical cause) and develop an odd manner of walking. Initially, these symptoms were believed to have come from some new type of severe concussion. Since these symptoms were common after exposure to exploding shells the term 'shell shock' was coined by a Royal Army Medical Corps captain in 1915 in order to name the condition.[9] However, over the course of the war, other soldiers who had never been exposed to shell blasts began to exhibit the same symptoms. In order to account for this discrepancy, a neurasthenia (nervous breakdown) category was added to the diagnosis of shell shock.[10] At this time, the belief was that if the physical stimuli (the shelling exposure) was not the cause of the symptoms, then they must have been caused by an underlying mental weakness in the afflicted individual.[11]

WWII

[8] Friedman, 2018
[9] Friedman, 2018
[10] Friedman, 2018
[11] Committee on the Assessment of Ongoing Effects in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, 2012

With the beginning of WWII, the same symptoms noted in previous wars began to appear once again in soldiers. Rather than continuing with any of the previous names assigned to the symptoms, new names such as 'battle fatigue', 'combat fatigue' and 'combat stress reaction' began to be used.[12] At this time, the new belief arose that the symptoms and condition were related to long deployments away from home. During WWII, combat fatigue was a major issue for the military, with up to half of military discharges potentially having been related to the condition.[13]

Further American wars will be considered later, however from this point on, wars are not seen as turning points in the evolution of the modern understanding of PTSD. After WWII, the western psychiatric community began to view the condition more stably, in the sense that the name for the condition did not repeatedly change over time.

PTSD-Evolving

DSM-I

The condition of Gross Stress Disorder (the initial name for PTSD) first appeared in the DSM-I (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 1952. Following WWII, the condition was so widespread that the American Psychiatric Association included the condition in their first edition. Unlike later editions, regarding PTSD, the DSM-I was a very limited diagnosis with far less research contribution. At the time, the condition was viewed as being short-lived. If symptoms lasted for longer than six months then it was believed that the symptoms had nothing to do with wartime service but rather indicated an inherent flaw in the individual's character and ability.[14]

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[12] Friedman, 2018
[13] Gradus 2009
[14] American Psychiatric Association, 1952

DSM-II

The DSM-II (1968), did not include 'PTSD' but rather included the diagnosis of 'Adjustment Reaction to Adult Life.'[15] However, this diagnosis was not effective in describing the symptomology of PTSD as defined by later diagnostic criterias. Rather, this diagnostic focused primarily on maladaptive patterns of behavior. This edition leaned heavily upon psychodynamic theory.[16]

DSM-III

With the publication of the DSM-III (1980), PTSD was reintroduced as a condition. This entry provided the first 'modern' diagnosis in the sense that it was grounded in scholarly research. Specifically, the PTSD diagnostic included research regarding severe trauma survivors. This study included veterans, holocaust survivors, and sexual trauma victims.[17] By including groups beyond soldiers in the research for the diagnosis, the 1980 manual began to expand the understanding of those who experience trauma and the results of this traumatic experience. It is also important to note that this edition was also the first to clearly distinguish between a trauma and a stressor. While stressors are an expected part of daily life, a trauma distinctly differs from the norms of societal expectations. This diagnostic marked a difference in sentiment compared to the 1968 DSM-II's categorization of the symptomatology of an 'adjustment reaction.' This redefinition made clear that all suffering from PTSD were reacting to experiences beyond the norm of everyday life.

[15] American Psychiatric Association, 1968
[16] Friedman, 2018
[17] American Psychiatric Association, 1980

DSM Changes from the Fourth to Fifth Edition

With the publication of the DSM-5.0 (2013), the guidelines for diagnosis of PTSD experienced a substantial change. Rather than remaining in the 'Anxiety Disorder' class as it had previously been categorized, PTSD moved to the 'Trauma and Stressor Related Disorders' category. This distinction resulted in the inclusion of other symptoms than those typically associated with anxiety conditions, while also establishing the precondition of a traumatic event.[18] Perhaps the most controversial change effected Criterion A, which delineates what qualifies as a traumatic event and the degree of exposure required for diagnosis. The DSM-5.0 narrowed the types of events that qualifed as trauma to "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence." [19] Changing precipitating event qualifications impacted PTSD prevalence, as it excluded witnessing nonviolent deaths from qualification as a trauma.

In a 2013 study, Kilpatrick et al. found that the prevalence of PTSD based upon DSM-IV and DSM-5.0 criteria were significantly different when comparing the two editions, with the DSM-5.0 having lower prevalence rates overall.[20] The main reason that individuals did not qualify under the DSM-5.0 criteria was the adjustment to Criterion A that excluded nonaccidental, nonviolent deaths and the new requirement for including at least one avoidance symptom.[21] When looking at the diagnostic algorithms from the DSM-5.0 compared to classification rates from the DSM-IV, Calhoun et al. similarly found that the restricting of qualifications for Criterion A led to a decrease in PTSD diagnosis prevalence, with 6% of their subjects not qualifying under DSM-5.0 diagnostic criteria, although they would have under the previous guidelines.[22] In this study, the discrepancy between qualifying cases seems to have

[18] Pai et al., 2017, section 2
[19] American Psychiatric Association, 2013
[20] Kilpatrick et al., 2013, 537-437
[21] Kilpatrick et al., 2013, 537-547
[22] Calhoun et al., 2012, 1032-1042

primarily depended on learning of the death/illness of friends or family members. Overall, the tightening of Criterion A in DSM-5.0 appears to have led to fewer diagnoses of PTSD for individuals who historically would have met diagnostic parameters.

In addition to changes to Criterion A, the DSM-5.0 changed the symptom parameters of the earlier editions. The new edition contains four symptom clusters (compared to three), with numbing and avoidance symptoms now being separated. This change is significant as it required that all patients now diagnosed with PTSD experience active avoidance, whereas before only numbing or avoidance was specified.[23] In a study looking at the impact of the splitting of the symptom clusters, Forbes et al. found that rates of comorbidity for those experiencing PTSD and depression were significantly lower with the DSM-5.0 split symptom categories (10% lower in their study population).[24] These results indicated that refining the symptom diagnostics for PTSD may help prevent overdiagnosis of PTSD in those suffering from depression.

As can be expected with any redefining of disorder parameters, the DSM-5.0 has resulted in significant repercussions for the prevalence of PTSD in several specific groups (i.e., those who experienced medical trauma, a nonviolent death, or who comorbidly experience depression, etc.). The new edition also sets stricter standards for what qualifies as trauma and the symptoms required to meet PTSD standards in its new "Trauma and Stressor Related Disorders" category.[25]

Modern Diagnostics

Standard Operating Procedures

[23] Pai et al., 2017, sec. 4
[24] Forbes et al., 2011, 483-486
[25] American Psychiatric Association, 2013

The current standard for PTSD diagnosis in the US, since 2013, remains the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5.0).[26] All diagnostic information referenced in the following subsections comes from this publication.[27] For the purpose of this work, I will only be examining the main category of PTSD, not the subtype relevant for children under the age of six. This main category diagnostic is applicable to children over the age of six, adolescents and adults of all ages.

Symptoms

In order for an individual to be diagnosed with PTSD, they must meet the eight criteria listed in the DSM-5.0. Criterion A specifies what stressor(s) that an individual must have experienced to qualify. At a minimum of one experience, the individual must have either been directly exposed to, witnessed personally, or learned that an individual close to them has been exposed to death, death threats, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence. Additionally, individuals who are indirectly exposed to aversive details of trauma (i.e., first responders, medics, etc.) qualify in this category.

Once the experience of a trauma has been established in the record, in order to be recognized as a sufferer of PTSD, an individual must also experience symptoms in four categories: intrusion symptoms (i.e., upsetting memories that are unwanted, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional distress or physical reactivity to traumatic reminders); avoidance symptoms (i.e., avoiding trauma related thoughts or feelings or avoiding trauma-related external reminders); a negative alteration in cognitions and mood (i.e., an inability to recall key features

[26] The other standard for diagnosis used throughout much of the world is the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which is published by the World Health Organization and is currently in its 11th revision. World Health Organization 2019

[27] American Psychiatric Association, 2013

of the traumatic event, overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world, exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma, negative affect, decreased interest in activities, feelings of isolation, difficulty experiencing positive affect); and alterations in arousal and reactivity (i.e., an increase in irritability or aggression, risky or destructive behavior, hypervigilance, heightened startle response, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping). An individual need not experience all of the possible symptoms: in fact it would be almost impossible to do so, considering the wide breadth of symptoms. However, in order for an individual to be diagnosed with PTSD they must experience the following: at least one symptom from the intrusion category (criterion B), at least one symptom from the avoidance symptom category (criterion C), at least two symptoms in the negative alterations in cognitions and mood category (criterion D) and at least one example of an alteration in behavior from the arousal and reactivity category (criterion E).

Since some people may experience symptoms for only a short period of time after a trauma, criterion F of the diagnostic requires that symptoms last for more than a month before diagnosis may occur. In order to prevent overdiagnosis in individuals that do not require it, criterion G, regarding functional significance, requires that the symptoms either distress the individual or cause functional impairment. However, this criterion tends to simply be a technicality, since an individual is unlikely to seek help or be recommended for treatment if there is not some degree of distress or functional impairment. The final criterion in the DSM-5.0 regarding PTSD includes the standard exclusion criterion which requires that the symptoms are not the result of medication, substance abuse or some other illness.

Specifications

After the eight primary criteria for PTSD have been met, it is possible for an individual to further meet the criteria for a specification version of the condition. The two possible specifications are the dissociative specification and the delayed specification. The dissociative specification entails that the individual, in addition to all previous symptoms, experiences either high levels of depersonalization or derealization when exposed to trauma-related stimuli. Alternatively, the delayed specification requires that all of the criteria for diagnosis are not met until at least 6 months after the precipitating trauma, though symptoms may have begun immediately. It is important to note that not all PTSD diagnoses fit one of these specifications: the distinction merely exists to help those individuals that fall under the specification category.

PTSD by the Numbers

The most recent large-scale national survey, the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), was conducted between 2001 and 2003 and assessed participants for PTSD (based upon DSM-IV criteria), among other conditions. The survey found that in adults over the age of 18 about 3.5% of the population experienced PTSD in the past year.[28] Prevalence was higher in women (5.2% of the population) than men (1.8% of the population).[29] The survey further found that the lifetime prevalence of PTSD in the general population was 6.8%, with 3.6% among men and 9.7% among women.[30] Overall, therefore, there seems to be a greater likelihood that women will be diagnosed with PTSD. Notably, these findings are similar to those of the first National Comorbidity Survey, conducted in the early 1990s.[31]

[28] Kessler et al., 2005, 617-627
[29] National Comorbidity Survey 2005, Kessler et al., 2005
[30] National Comorbidity Survey 2005, Kessler et al., 2005

[31] Gradus, 2009

Several studies have been conducted regarding the prevalence of PTSD among combat veterans. In the late 1980s, the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS) found a lifetime prevalence of PTSD of 30.9% for men and 26.9% for women.[32] A study by Kang et al. found that the PTSD prevalence rate (as of 1995-1997) of Gulf War veterans randomly surveyed was 12.1%.[33] A similar study by the RAND Corporation, Center for Military Health Policy Research, found that soldiers deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq had a current PTSD prevalence rate of 13.8% in 2008[34]. It is thus clear that veterans have far higher prevalence rates for PTSD than the general population in the U.S., which is to be expected considering their increased exposure to traumatic events during combat and service.

Although the World Health Organization (WHO) has been collecting mental health disorder information since the 1990s,[35] it remains difficult to compare national statistics because of differing diagnostic criteria, differing sampling strategies, and cultural differences regarding the acceptability of various mental health disorders (including PTSD) across nationalities.

Stigma

Crossover with Other Conditions and Symptoms

Symptoms of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) have a large potential for causing a misdiagnosis of PTSD. The primary issue when it comes to distinguishing TBI and PTSD is the use of self-report questionnaires for the purpose of initial screenings. Sumpter et al. compared the likelihood of a PTSD diagnosis after a TBI from either a structured interview or self-reporting.[36] They found that the odds of an individual being diagnosed based upon a

[32] Kulka et al., 1990
[33] Kang et al., 2003, 141-148
[34] Tanielian & Jaycox 2008
[35] Kessler & Ustun 2008, 1-580
[36] Sumpter & McMillan 2005, 423-426

structured interview were significantly lower than through self reporting, likely due to the confusion between which symptoms are a result of the TBI and which would be the effects of PTSD.[37] This category of problem indicates that self-reporting diagnostics may result in overdiagnosis, since the causality of certain symptoms is not always clear.

As a part of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (under both DSM-IV and DSM-5.0), sleep disturbances are listed as a potential symptom. In fact, around 70% of diagnosed patients report sleep disturbances of some sort.[38] Non-PTSD related sleep disturbances can thus easily be mistaken for the reactivation of PTSD symptoms. Specifically, REM Sleep Behavior Disorder can mirror PTSD related sleep disturbances in symptomatology.[39] In order to prevent misdiagnosis of PTSD, it is important that diagnosticians accurately identify the causality of any sleep disturbances.

Diagnostic Dilemma

As the modern definition of the condition of PTSD continues to evolve, so too must society's awareness of potential problems associated with its diagnosis adapt. In the conflict between ensuring that a condition's diagnostic criteria is neither too broad, resulting in overdiagnosis, nor too narrow, resulting in underdiagnosis, the DSM-5.0 criteria changes must minimize potential negative impacts (such as a diagnosis that does not amply connect an individual with needed resources) by using more strictly defining guidelines. While this is a step in the right direction, diagnosticians must also continue to be vigilant and remain aware of potential outside factors (such as unrelated life occurrences) that could lead to misdiagnosis. There is no perfect solution when it comes to diagnostic criteria. However, the psychological

[37] Sumpter & McMillan 2005, 423-426
[38] Roepke et al., 2013
[39] Roepke et al., 2013

community must strive to reach a balance in which the potential for overdiagnosis, underdiagnosis, and misdiagnosis are as minimal as possible.

Support Systems

Having explored the history of PTSD and its modern diagnostics, a question remains: why is it that everyone who experiences a traumatic event does not develop PTSD?

Risk Factors

A group of individuals can all experience the same traumatic event, and yet they may all also react differently to the aftermath. While there is no certain way to predict how someone will react to a traumatic event nor can experiments be conducted to find out for ethical reasons, research into the topic has identified certain risk factors that may help prevent the development of PTSD or conversely may increase an individual's probability of developing the condition after trauma exposure. It has generally been found that "helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma" while "empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery," thus creating a general framework from which risk factors can be identified.[40] Much of the research in this area has been conducted with veterans in mind, so that will be the primary focus of this section, though many of these factors can also apply to victims of various types of trauma.

In terms of factors that place an individual at greater risk of PTSD, much research focuses on the support network that a veteran finds upon returning home. Specifically, Tsai et al. found that generally those veterans with PTSD have greater difficulty in various relationships (with romantic partners and family members), have less social support, poorer social functioning,

[40] Herman 2015

and lower life satisfaction than those without PTSD.[41] While causality cannot be drawn between the factors and the diagnosis, there seems to be some relationship between poorer family functioning and lower relationship satisfaction and PTSD in veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, the veterans in this study found that less community support, excessive worry, increased rigidity, and lower levels of openness to relationships were mediators between PTSD and poor social functioning. So while a direct path cannot be drawn between them, these mediators can contribute to poorer social functioning outcomes which in turn may cause increased severity of PTSD symptoms.

Moreover, in a systematic review of veterans suffering from PTSD after the Gulf War, Iraq War, and deployment to Afghanistan, Wright et al. explored connections between pre-trauma vulnerability, psychiatric history, neuroticism, and increased rates of PTSD.[42] These findings were similarly identified in the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study which had been conducted years prior.[43] While researchers found that low levels of family and community support after trauma exposure were similarly associated with higher levels of PTSD, their linkage between pre-trauma risk factors and diagnosis is important because the research indicates that some individuals are more prone to symptom acquisition than others based upon these risk factors.

Spirituality

Even after a PTSD diagnosis, not all cases are the same. Some individuals experience more severe symptoms than others and the length of time that symptoms are experienced can range from months to years. However, there are some ways in which symptom severity may be

[41] Tsai et al., 2012, 135-149
[42] Wright et al., 2013, 310-318
[43] Kulka et al., 1990

reduced in veterans suffering from military related PTSD. Spirituality has served as a touchstone for individuals for millenia, and it can serve as a support system for veterans as well. Bormann et al. explored additional mechanisms that can decrease symptom severity in veterans with PTSD.[44] Specifically, they investigated how using a mantra (either a word or phrase) has been shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD. This reduction in symptoms could be as a result of the mantra redirecting attention and starting the relaxation process. However, they also found that existential spiritual well-being mediates the reductions in symptoms, with an increase in existential spiritual well-being serving as a mechanism that helps mantras reduce PTSD symptom severity. This finding demonstrates how it is possible for individuals to utilize mantras or their own version of spirituality (the method does not need to be religious necessarily), in order to cope with PTSD symptoms.

Suicide Risk

Even after a diagnosis of PTSD has been established, not all cases are equal. Unfortunately, some individuals struggle more than others and may not see a way through their symptoms and may attempt suicide. Certain types of symptoms tend to be more frequently associated with suicidal ideation, and I will explore that relationship in this section in particular in order to set the stage for my treatment of Sophocles' *Ajax* later in this work.

In their study, Brown et al. aimed to identify association with certain PTSD symptom clusters and suicidal ideation (SI) in veterans.[45] They found a statistically significant association between each symptom cluster and suicidal ideation. Specifically, they found that negative alterations in the mood and cognition symptom cluster (criterion D) is more strongly associated

[44] Bormann et al., 2012, 496-502
[45] Brown et al., 2020, 1-6

with suicidal ideation than alterations in the arousal and reactivity cluster (criterion E). This indicates that specifically targeting mood and cognition symptoms may help with suicide prevention efforts among veterans.

A study in Denmark found that an individual with PTSD had 13 times the rate of suicide than an individual without PTSD.[46] Meanwhile, in the United States in 2017, the suicide rate for veterans was found to be 1.5 times the rate for non-veteran adults.[47] While there is no conclusive answer as to whether PTSD (diagnosed or undiagnosed) causes increased suicide rates, it is clear that the relationship between suicide and PTSD is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed.

Alternate Types of Trauma: Sexual Assault, Medical Trauma, and Covid

Sexual Assault Victims

While sexual assault victims are not the focus of this work, it would be remiss to avoid the topic of PTSD and sexual trauma entirely. Almost half of all diagnosed PTSD cases in the U.S. are due to sexual or physical violence; whether that be sexual assault, partner violence, mugging, or childhood abuse. In any given year, around 30% of all diagnosed cases of PTSD are due to sexual violence.[48] In fact, the highest rate of PTSD (proportion of trauma experiences that result in a diagnosis of PTSD) can be found in victims of sexual assault.

Among female rape victims, approximately 50% will develop PTSD after the trauma.[49] While about half of those women will recover, about a quarter of them will not experience symptom reduction over time. It is important to note that victims of sexual violence will often experience the same combinations of PTSD symptoms as combat veterans.

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[46] Gradus 2017, 1-3
[47] Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention 2019
[48] Yehuda et al., 2015
[49] Yehuda et al., 2015

The Covid Question

Over a year into a global pandemic, the United States' (and the world's) healthcare system, both for physical and mental health, has been pushed to the breaking point. Society in general has been forced to adapt to ever-changing standards for public interaction and medical intervention. The mental health community has also been forced to adapt to more virtual modes of care and respond to unique stressors and the toll that they take on individuals. In particular, the issue of Covid-19 related stress has come into the spotlight as the healthcare system does its best to adapt to an unpredictable and atypical situation.

A primary issue associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and PTSD is that though individuals may have PTSD-like symptoms as a result of the general circumstances created by the pandemic, that does not necessarily indicate that a PTSD diagnosis is warranted. Experiencing stress-related symptoms, such as anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, or sleep-related symptoms, is not abnormal after society as a whole has been restructured and social isolation has been encouraged for the health of all. Moreover, exposure to pandemic-related stressors varies: patients with minor cases, patients who have to undergo frightening procedures such as being put on a ventilator, family members, health care workers (both those who are used to dealing with frequent deaths and illnesses and those who are not) are exposed to varying types of stressors and can be expected to handle them differently.[50] An ICU nurse with 25 years of experience would naturally be expected to handle exposure to a high number of deaths related to Covid-19 better than a college student who decided to volunteer time at the hospital. Due to the high variability in exposure to stressors and the prevalence of stress-related symptoms during uncertain times, Covid-19 makes it difficult to differentiate between stress symptoms and PTSD.

[50] Tucker & Czapla 2021

In discussing the pandemic, the word 'trauma' has been used frequently in the media in ways that may not actually qualify as trauma by mental health standards.[51] Though the DSM-5.0 narrowed Criterion A for traumatic experiences, the "actual or threatened death" and "serious injury" components do provide leeway for providers and diagnosing those in need[52]. With time, research will help determine better standards for handling Covid-19 related stress and PTSD. The pandemic has placed new pressures on the mental health system, and regardless of when it may end, providers have been forced to adapt to ever-changing circumstances in order to best support those in need.

Conclusion

This review of the psychological literature regarding PTSD clarifies that PTSD is not a new condition. Despite PTSD's many names and ways that the condition has been treated by societies, at its core, the condition has remained fairly stable. Having experienced trauma, and depending on a variety of risk factors, some individuals develop intrusive or disturbing symptoms as a stress response.

With the completion of the review of modern psychological research and historical approaches to PTSD, I will now set out to apply this information to the *Ajax*. I will assess the relationship between the *Ajax* and the most common symptoms of PTSD outlined above. Additionally, having established the most common forms of reception of soldiers post-trauma and the importance of community support when it comes to healing and reintegration of veterans, I will use these categories in the following chapters.

[51] American Psychiatric Association 2013
[52] American Psychiatric Association 2013

Chapter 2: A New Reading of Sophocles' Ajax

The Ajax

Since ancient Greek literature is a broad category, and since even the genre of Athenian tragedy encompasses a wide expanse of situations and attitudes, I focus this project on only one specific work of literature: Sophocles' *Ajax,* a tragedy believed to have been written and performed in the mid-fifth century BCE (Sophocles himself lived from 496 BCE to 406 BCE and the *Ajax* is believed to have been one of his earlier plays.[53] The play follows the struggle of Ajax, the great Aeginetan hero-warrior, in the time after the completion of the events of the *Iliad* but before the end of the Trojan War. As the classic Greek hero, Ajax can be uncompromising; this character trait ultimately leads to him rejecting help from the Goddess Athena. Unfortunately, the goddess does not take this rejection well and purportedly causes the soldier to suffer from an episode of induced violent madness. Thinking that he is slaughtering his enemies, Ajax goes on a rampage, killing and torturing livestock. His companions, the Greek chorus and even his enemy, Odysseus, react with horror at his actions and the implications that they hold for Ajax's future and that of his family. The play goes on to describe how Ajax emerges from his fit of madness, realizes what he has done, and is overwhelmed by his shame for his emotional weakness and loss of control. The tragedy ends with Ajax's suicide. This is such a well-known scene that it was depicted on ancient Athenian vase paintings.[54] The fact that so many iterations of the scene of Ajax's death have survived to the present day indicates that this was a very popular visual which Athenian citizens would have been confronted with on a regular basis. The struggle with soldiers

[53] Taplin & Woodard 2021
[54] 400-350 BCE BM 0508.1328, ca. 530 BCE "The Suicide of Ajax" Château-Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer, See Appendix for images

returning changed by war was likely a cultural phenomenon, resulting in the renditions of Ajax by both Sophocles and vase painters. Neither category of creator executed their work in a vacuum, but rather likely made art that reflected their own surroundings and culture. This dual indication of exposure to the suicide scene is a rare combination of corroboration between an ancient play and ancient visual representations of the staged story.

My Translations

In this chapter, I present my own translations of the passages that I have selected along with a commentary on each passage in the standard format used in Greek philology. Drawing from the key themes in Chapter 1, I will discuss the passages in the context of three main categories: descriptions of madness, community perceptions, and suicide. I chose these section headers because they highlight the key aspects of the play as it relates to PTSD. I have selected and translated seven selections in total, with between four and six passages analyzed in each of the different thematic sections. In order to formulate these translations, I worked with Sir Richard Jebb's translation and commentary from 1907 and the Loeb Library volume 1 (Greek tragedy) translation, edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. All definitions for vocabulary are taken from the new Cambridge Greek Lexicon unless otherwise specified. In some cases, I add a definition or information from the large Liddell Greek-to-English dictionary. After identifying pertinent passages in the Lloyd-Jones' Loeb translation, I then worked with other translations alongside my own knowledge of ancient Greek to formulate my own translations.

Descriptions of Madness

Selection 1. Here, Athena describes how she controlled Ajax's mind.

Ἀθήνα		**Athena**
ἐγὼ δὲ φοιτῶντ᾽ ἄνδρα μανιάσιν νόσοις ὤτρυνον, εἰσέβαλλον εἰς ἕρκη κακά.	60	I was provoking him to go to and fro with plagues of his mind; I threw him into a wicked trap.

60 **ὤτρυνον** "stir up, provoke:" imperfect, a verb tense that emphasizes a sense of continuity. Athena's provoking was not a one time action, but rather an ongoing one, lasting during the course of Ajax's mania.

59 **φοιτῶντ**᾽ "pacing up and down, going back and forth, going about in various directions, roaming about:" a present active participle, indicates repeated and ceaseless continuity of movement at a time relative to the main verb. This verb has been used in Greek literature to both refer to warriors in battle (*Iliad*) and ghosts (*Iliad*, Hesiod). As a very old word that is used often, the audience would have been familiar with the various common connotations associated with the term. It is possible that this sort of repetition is a physical means of self-soothing (see mantras in Chapter 1) or a physical manifestation of psychological disturbance.

59 **μανιάσιν** "a madness:", a word that is repeated throughout the play. In this passage, the term is plural, indicating a multiplicity of the madnesses that plague Ajax. See Section 4 of this chapter for more discussion of this term.

60 **ἕρκη κακά** "horrible bonds:" noun meaning a physical enclosure; plural; Ajax cannot escape the numerous forms of the bonds.

Selection 2. In this scene, Athena shows Odysseus what has happened to Ajax. Odysseus reflects on what this means for both himself and society as a whole.

Ἀθήνα ὁρᾷς, Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχὺν ὅση; τούτου τίς ἄν σοι τἀνδρὸς ἢ προνούστερος ἢ δρᾶν ἀμείνων ηὑρέθη τὰ καίρια; **Ὀδυσσεύς** ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν᾽ οἶδ᾽: ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ, ὀθούνεκ᾽ ἄτῃ συγκατέζευκται κακῇ, οὐδὲν τὸ τούτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοὐμὸν σκοπῶν: ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν εἴδωλ᾽ ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν.	**Athena** Do you see, Odysseus, how great the strength of the gods is? Whom could you have found more prudent than this man, or better able to do what the occasion required? **Odysseus** I know of none, but in his misery I pity him all the same, even though he hates me, because he is bound fast by a ruinous delusion— when I see him like this I think of my own possible fate. For I see that all of us who live are nothing more than phantoms or fleeting shadows.

120-121 **ἢ προνούστερος ἢ δρᾶν** "either more prudent or able:" significant because the line indicates the contrast between what Ajax was once capable of compared to his current state. This line throws the hero's downfall into an even harsher light and emphasizes how in the Greek conception both his mind and his ability to do things have been compromised. Odysseus is another example of a Greek hero who is frequently characterized by his mind and his abilities with speech, so the fact that this line is being spoken to him is significant, since out of the ancient Greek heroes Odysseus is best equipped to understand the significance of Ajax's words.

124 **ἄτῃ συγκατέζευκται κακῇ** "bound together with bad things", "yoke together, force into marriage, be fastened inescapably:" this verb has historically been used to describe the ties of

marriage. While Ajax's bonds are not those of marriage, Sophocles' use of a verb often denoting such bonds emphasizes that Ajax cannot escape his condition. Just like a bride, Ajax is only able to escape what torments him through death.

127 **Εἴδωλ'… κουφην σκιάν**: "phantom … unsubstantial shadow:" repetition; the line as a whole shows the futility of life and emphasizes the horrible nature of Ajax's downfall. Even though Ajax still lives and has accomplished many things, the reality of his mental situation has led him to becoming a shadow of what he once was. He is no longer the vibrant hero of lore but rather a broken man.

Selection 3. Here, Tecmessa (Ajax's war-concubine) begins her monologue regarding what occurred the night before. She details Ajax's actions while he experienced the throes of his madness.

Τέκμησσα		**Tecmessa**
πῶς δῆτα λέγω λόγον ἄρρητον; θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον βάρος ἐκπεύσει. μανίᾳ γὰρ ἁλοὺς ἡμὶν ὁ κλεινὸς νύκτερος Αἴας ἀπελωβήθη. τοιαῦτ' ἂν ἴδοις σκηνῆς ἔνδον χειροδάϊκτα σφάγι' αἱμοβαφῆ, κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός.	215 220	Oh, how can I tell a tale too terrible for words? You will learn about a weight as heavy as death. Glorious Ajax was seized by madness during the night, and he has been subjected to utter disgrace. All this you may see inside his dwelling—butchered victims bathed in blood, sacrifices of no hand but his.

216 **θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον βάρος** "weight equal to death:" his tragic mental situation is comparative to death for the Greeks. It is possible that this equivalence exists because mentally ill individuals were viewed as continuously suffering and as such would have been better off moving on to the realm of Hades.

217 **μανίᾳ γὰρ ἁλοὺς** "seized by madness:" This phrase once again brings up Ajax's madness (μανίᾳ, see section 4, below). Further, by using ἁλοὺς ("seized") the text emphasizes how Ajax's disease results from violent action. The verb can be translated as "to be taken, conquered, seized, captured, overcome or fall into the enemy's hand." All of these definitions connote strong violence, where the action committed is done against the recipient, contrary to their will. While Sophocles is the only one to use this verb in relation to madness,[55] it is frequently used in Homer and Herodotus to describe people, animals, places and possessions.

220 **Χειροδάϊκτα** "slain by hand:" rather than killing the animals in the traditional manner, he is killing them with his own bare hands. Moreover, in combination with **χρηστήρια**, which has an implied meaning regarding sacrifices for an oracle, Ajax's actions are further juxtaposed against the proper situations in which sacrifices ought to occur and how they should be carried out. This phrase shows just how far he has fallen from the norms of society.

Selection 4. In this scene, Tecmessa and the chorus lament that Ajax has not recovered from his hallucinations and mental suffering.

Τέκμησσα	**Tecmessa**

[55] The significance of this will be further discussed below.

ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος, ἡνίκ᾽ ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ,	That man, while he was in the throes of the disease, took pleasure for himself in the dire straits that were possessing him, though his presence distressed us who were sane. But now, since he has had pause and respite from the sickness, he is completely wracked by every kind of horrible pain, and we are equally grieved. Surely, then, these are two sorrows, instead of one?
αὐτὸς μὲν ἥδεθ᾽ οἷσιν εἶχετ᾽ ἐν κακοῖς,	
ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών:	
νῦν δ᾽ ὡς ἔληξε κἀνέπνευσε τῆς νόσου, 275	
κεῖνός τε λύπῃ πᾶς ἐλήλαται κακῇ	
ἡμεῖς θ᾽ ὁμοίως οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ πάρος.	
ἆρ᾽ ἔστι ταῦτα δὶς τόσ᾽ ἐξ ἁπλῶν κακά;	
Χορός	**Chorus**
ξύμφημι δή σοι καὶ δέδοικα μὴ 'κ θεοῦ	Indeed, I agree, and so I fear that a blow sent by a god has struck him. How could it be otherwise, if he is still no happier than when he was in the throes of the disease?
πληγή τις ἥκῃ. πῶς γάρ, εἰ πεπαυμένος 280	
μηδέν τι μᾶλλον ἢ νοσῶν εὐφραίνεται;	

273 **ἥδεθ᾽ οἷσιν εἶχετ᾽ ἐν κακοῖς** “took delight for himself in the bad things possessing him:” phrase further emphasizes the degree to which Ajax’s change in mental state is being done against his will. It is not that he wants these horrible images and desires to fill his head, but rather that they are holding him captive in a way, binding him within them. **εἶχετ᾽** is the most common word referring to possessing of someone or something. The *Cambridge Lexicon* alone contains 55 separate entries regarding the context in which the word can be used and the verb’s numerous connotations. By using such a variable word, Sophocles conveys an abundance of information while using few syllables and very little time in the context of the entire tragedy.

272, 275,281 **ἐν τῇ νόσῳ, τῆς νόσου, νοσῶν** “sickness, disease, plague:” repetition of this word

emphasizes Ajax's condition viewed as a physical malady, in addition to a mental one. In fact, this play may help illustrate how the ancient Athenians viewed disease and emotion being linked in the same way as mental and physical suffering would have been.

279-280 **δέδοικα μὴ 'κ θεοῦ πληγή τις ἥκῃ** "I fear that a blow sent by a god has struck him:" rather than solely attributing his condition to Ajax alone, this line emphasizes that a Greek could attribute such mania to the actions of the gods. Here, since Ajax's madness is attributed to divine intervention, Sophocles implies that Ajax's responsibility is limited. This conception of personal responsibility differs from typical American responses to someone's madness which tend to assign blame to the individual suffering from a mental illness. Though Ajax must deal with the repercussions of his madness, he himself is not deemed responsible for what has befallen him.

273, 276, 278 **κακοῖς, κακῇ, κακά** "bad, wicked:" repeated three times in a single monologue, always the last word of the line. A rhetorical tool emphasizing the horrific and compounded nature of the symptoms.

Selection 5. Here, the chorus laments Ajax's fate, detailing the impact that his downfall will have on those around him.

Χορός καί μοι δυσθεράπευτος Αἴας 610 ξύνεστιν ἔφεδρος, ὤμοι μοι, θείᾳ μανίᾳ ξύναυλος:	**Chorus** And now a new struggle awaits me, a match with Ajax, hard to cure, living with a madness of divine origin. It is he whom in fact you sent out before as a man who was most dominant in bold war. But now he is changed; he shepherds his thoughts in isolated places and has found deep mourning for his friends. The

ὃν ἐξεπέμψω πρὶν δή ποτε θουρίῳ κρατοῦντ᾽ ἐν Ἄρει: νῦν δ᾽ αὖ φρενὸς οἰοβώτας φίλοις μέγα πένθος ηὕρηται. τὰ πρὶν δ᾽ ἔργα χεροῖν μεγίστας ἀρετᾶς ἄφιλα παρ᾽ ἀφίλοις ἔπεσ᾽ ἔπεσε μελέοις Ἀτρείδαις.	former achievements of his own two hands, the most supreme accomplishments of his excellence, they have fallen, they have fallen, meaningless, without friends, before the miserable sons of Atreus.
ἦ που παλαιᾷ μὲν σύντροφος ἀμέρᾳ, λευκῷ δὲ γήρᾳ μάτηρ νιν ὅταν νοσοῦντα φρενομόρως ἀκούσῃ, αἴλινον αἴλινον οὐδ᾽ οἰκτρᾶς γόον ὄρνιθος ἀηδοῦς ἥσει δύσμορος, ἀλλ᾽ ὀξυτόνους μὲν ᾠδὰς θρηνήσει, χερόπλακτοι δ᾽ ἐν στέρνοισι πεσοῦνται δοῦποι καὶ πολιᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας.	Surely when his mother, companion of antiquity and grey with age, hears that he is sick with the ruin of his mind, she will raise a funeral lament, a death song. It is not the nightingale's piteous lament that she, unhappy, will sing. Rather in shrill-toned odes the dirge will rise, and her hands will thud as they beat her breast, and her grey hair will be torn.

κρείσσων παρ᾽ Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν,	Yes, he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades

610 **δυσθεράπευτος** "hard to look after, hard to cure:" specifically used in reference to a deranged person.

616 **πένθος** "feeling of sadness or distress; sorrow, grief, distress" or "feeling or expression of sorrow for the dead; mourning, lamentation". A word of utter loss. This word is used prolifically in Greek from Homer on. Here, Sophocles uses this word of mourning, despite the fact that Ajax still lives.

616 **ηὕρηται** "finds (himself):" passive voice, emphasizes that Ajax's current condition was done to him as a possession of the gods and as such was not his fault.

626 **νοσοῦντα** "disease, ail, plague:" once again (see section 4), this word is used, adding to the understanding of Ajax's condition as a disease.

627 **φρενομόρως** this word is extremely powerful. It literally means to "destroy the mind" and adds gravity to what has befallen Ajax. It is worth noting that this word does not appear in the Cambridge Lexicon. The large Liddell Greek dictionary defines it as above. This word only appears in works by Sophocles, indicating that he may have had to invent a new word in order to adequately describe what his protagonist is experiencing. More examples of unique words and their significance can be found below.

620 **μεγίστας ἀρετᾶς** "great excellence:" contrast between what Ajax once accomplished as a war hero with his downfall once again.

Community Perceptions

Beyond the specific passages, the role of the chorus is key to the concept of community support (Chapter 1). Here, the chorus represents the larger community of Ajax's peers. In this section, I will highlight scenes in which the chorus or other relevant characters remark upon Ajax's actions. These depictions provide insight into the predominant views of the community, as depicted by Sophocles, regarding Ajax's plight.

Selection 2. In this scene, Athena shows Odysseus what has happened to Ajax. Odysseus reflects on what this means for both himself and society as a whole.

Ἀθήνα ὁρᾷς, Ὀδυσσεῦ, τὴν θεῶν ἰσχὺν ὅση; τούτου τίς ἄν σοι τἀνδρὸς ἢ προνούστερος 120 ἢ δρᾶν ἀμείνων ηὑρέθη τὰ καίρια;	**Athena** Do you see, Odysseus, how great the strength of the gods is? Whom could you have found more prudent than this man, or better able to do what the occasion required?
Ὀδυσσεύς ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδέν᾽ οἶδ᾽: ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ, ὀθούνεκ᾽ ἄτῃ συγκατέζευκται κακῇ,	**Odysseus** I know of none, but in his misery I pity him all the same, even though he hates me, because he is bound fast by a ruinous delusion— when I see him like this I think of my own possible fate. For I see that all of us who live are nothing more than

οὐδὲν τὸ τούτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοὐμὸν σκοπῶν: 125 ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν εἴδωλ᾽ ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν.	phantoms or fleeting shadows.

122 **ἐποικτίρω "**to have compassion on, to pity:" Ajax's circumstances have been so altered that even his enemy, Odysseus, pities his fate. Looking upon Ajax's conditions from the outside, Odyseus begins to question his own fate and that of all of humanity.

127 **εἴδωλ᾽ ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν** "(those who) live are nothing more than phantoms or fleeting shadows:" as a member of the community, Odysseus observes what has come of Ajax. To the Athenian audience and therefore society, Ajax seems to no longer be the whole man that he once was, but rather a poor remnant of his former self.

Selection 3. Here, Tecmessa (Ajax's war-concubine) begins her monologue regarding what occurred the night before. She details Ajax's actions while he was in the throes of his madness.

Τέκμησσα		**Tecmessa**
πῶς δῆτα λέγω λόγον ἄρρητον;	215	Oh, how can I tell a tale too terrible for words?
θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον βάρος ἐκπεύσει.		You will learn about a weight as heavy as death.
μανίᾳ γὰρ ἁλοὺς ἡμὶν ὁ κλεινὸς		Glorious Ajax was seized by madness during
νύκτερος Αἴας ἀπελωβήθη.		the night, and he has been subjected to utter disgrace.
τοιαῦτ᾽ ἂν ἴδοις σκηνῆς ἔνδον		
χειροδάϊκτα σφάγι᾽ αἱμοβαφῆ,	220	
κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός.		

	All this you may see inside his dwelling—butchered victims bathed in blood, sacrifices of no hand but his.

215 **λόγον ἄρρητον** "unspeakable words:" to Tecmessa, what has befallen Ajax is too horrible to even be spoken about. This lack of description might be significant because women are often able to describe things very well in tragedy (i.e., Clytemnestra, Antigone, Medea etc.). The fact that Tecmessa cannot speak here may indicate that what Ajax has done has gone beyond description in some sort of fundamental way.

218 **ἀπελωβήθη** "to suffer complete disgrace:" passive, indicating that Ajax has not necessarily done anything to deserve the humiliation that comes with his loss of control, but has been disgraced nonetheless.

Selection 4. In this scene, Tecmessa and the chorus lament that Ajax has not recovered from his hallucinations and mental suffering.

Τέκμησσα	**Tecmessa**
ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος, ἡνίκ᾽ ἦν ἐν τῇ νόσῳ,	That man, while he was in the throes of the disease, took pleasures for himself in the dire straits that were possessing him, though his presence distressed us who were sane. But now, since he has had pause and respite from the sickness, he is completely wracked by every kind of
αὐτὸς μὲν ἥδεθ᾽ οἷσιν εἴχετ᾽ ἐν κακοῖς,	
ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών:	
νῦν δ᾽ ὡς ἔληξε κἀνέπνευσε τῆς νόσου, 275	
κεῖνός τε λύπῃ πᾶς ἐλήλαται κακῇ	

ἡμεῖς θ᾽ ὁμοίως οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ πάρος.		horrible pain, and we are equally grieved.
ἆρ᾽ ἔστι ταῦτα δὶς τόσ᾽ ἐξ ἁπλῶν κακά;		Surely, then, these are two sorrows, instead of one?
Χορός		**Chorus**
ξύμφημι δή σοι καὶ δέδοικα μὴ 'κ θεοῦ		Indeed, I agree, and so I fear that a blow
πληγή τις ἥκῃ. πῶς γάρ, εἰ πεπαυμένος	280	sent by a god has struck him. How could it
μηδέν τι μᾶλλον ἢ νοσῶν εὐφραίνεται;		be otherwise, if he is still no happier than when he was in the throes of the disease?

274 **ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών** “his presence distressed us who were sane:” this line shows the clear discontent of the community regarding what has befallen Ajax. Here, the contrasting of the **φρονοῦντας**, or one’s who have their senses, with Ajax who does not, emphasizes Ajax’s otherness.

274 **ἠνία** “grieve, distress:” imperfect verb, indicating the continuousness of the distress for the public throughout this episode.

278 **ἆρ᾽ ἔστι ταῦτα δὶς τόσ᾽ ἐξ ἁπλῶν κακά;** “surely then these are two sorrows instead of one?” just as Ajax suffers, so too do those who care for him. Ajax’s madness is seen as a twofold tragedy as it not only harms him but also those within the community who witness what has occured.

Selection 5. Here, the chorus laments Ajax’s fate, detailing the impact that his downfall will have on those around him.

Χορός	**Chorus**
καί μοι δυσθεράπευτος Αἴας 610	And now a new struggle awaits me, a match with Ajax, hard to cure, living with a madness of divine origin. It is he whom in fact you sent out before as a man who was most dominant in bold war. But now he is changed; he shepherds his thoughts in isolated places and has found deep mourning for his friends. The former achievements of his own two hands, the most supreme accomplishments of his excellence, they have fallen, they have fallen, meaningless, without friends, before the miserable sons of Atreus.
ξύνεστιν ἔφεδρος, ὤμοι μοι,	
θείᾳ μανίᾳ ξύναυλος:	
ὃν ἐξεπέμψω πρὶν δή ποτε θουρίῳ	
κρατοῦντ᾽ ἐν Ἄρει: νῦν δ᾽ αὖ φρενὸς οἰοβώτας 615	
φίλοις μέγα πένθος ηὕρηται.	
τὰ πρὶν δ᾽ ἔργα χεροῖν	
μεγίστας ἀρετᾶς 620	
ἄφιλα παρ᾽ ἀφίλοις	
ἔπεσ᾽ ἔπεσε μελέοις Ἀτρείδαις.	
ἦ που παλαιᾷ μὲν σύντροφος ἀμέρᾳ, 625	Surely when his mother, companion of antiquity and grey with age, hears that he is sick with the ruin of his mind, she will raise a funeral lament, a death song. It is not the nightingale's piteous lament that she, unhappy, will sing. Rather in shrill-toned odes the dirge will rise, and her hands will thud as they beat her breast, and her grey hair will be torn.
λευκῷ δὲ γήρᾳ μάτηρ νιν ὅταν νοσοῦντα	
φρενομόρως ἀκούσῃ,	
αἴλινον αἴλινον	
οὐδ᾽ οἰκτρᾶς γόον ὄρνιθος ἀηδοῦς 630	
ἥσει δύσμορος, ἀλλ᾽ ὀξυτόνους μὲν ᾠδὰς	

θρηνήσει, <u>χερόπλακτοι δ'</u> <u>ἐν στέρνοισι πεσοῦνται</u> <u>δοῦποι καὶ πολιᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας.</u> <u>κρείσσων παρ' Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν</u> . . .	Yes, <u>he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades . . .</u>

616 **φίλοις μέγα πένθος ηὕρηται** "he found great grief for his friends:" this line in particular emphasizes the isolation associated with Ajax's madness. Not only does his condition set him apart due to his experience of symptoms, but his difference in persona also now sets him apart from even those who he once called friends.

621 **ἄφιλα … ἀφίλοις "**friendless … friendless:" in a single line, Ajax's state of friendlessness is repeated. His isolation from his community and social network is clear and emphasized. This word can also mean "bereft." Appearing in Lysias and several other authors, this word would have been well known and associated with other tragic characters.

632-634 **χερόπλακτοι δ'ἐν στέρνοισι πεσοῦνται δοῦποι καὶ πολιᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας.** See *The Nightingale Myth* section at the end of this chapter for a full explanation.

635 **κρείσσων παρ' Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν** "he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades:" Ajax's condition is considered hopeless by both the chorus and by extension his community. Rather than coming together in order to help Ajax, the community takes the view that it would be better for Ajax to be dead.

Selection 7. In this scene, Tecmessa discovers and reacts to Ajax's body. She insists that his body must be covered as his death is clearly due to suicide.

Χορός τίνος ποτ᾽ ἆρ᾽ ἔπραξε χειρὶ δύσμορος; **Τέκμησσα** αὐτὸς πρὸς αὑτοῦ, δῆλον: ἐν γάρ οἱ χθονὶ πηκτὸν τόδ᾽ ἔγχος περιπετὲς κατηγορεῖ. **Χορός** ὤμοι ἐμᾶς ἄτας, οἷος ἄρ᾽ αἱμάχθης, ἄφαρκτος φίλων: ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὁ πάντα κωφός, ὁ πάντ᾽ ἄϊδρις, κατημέλησα. πᾷ πᾷ κεῖται ὁ δυστράπελος, δυσώνυμος Αἴας; **Τέκμησσα** οὗτοι θεατός: ἀλλά νιν περιπτυχεῖ φάρει καλύψω τῷδε παμπήδην, ἐπεὶ οὐδεὶς ἄν, ὅστις καὶ φίλος, τλαίη βλέπειν φυσῶντ᾽ ἄνω πρὸς ῥῖνας ἔκ τε φοινίας πληγῆς μελανθὲν αἷμ᾽ ἀπ᾽ οἰκείας σφαγῆς.	**Chorus** But by whose hand can the ill-fated man have brought this end? **Tecmessa** He did it with his own hand; it is obvious. This sword which he planted in the ground and on which he fell convicts him. **Chorus** Ah, what blind foolishness I have displayed! All alone, then, you bled, unguarded by your friends! And I took no care, so entirely deaf was I, so totally ignorant. Where, where lies inflexible Ajax, whose name means anguish? **Tecmessa** No, he must not be looked at! I will cover him over completely with this cloak enfolding him, since no one—no one, that is, who loves him—could bear to see him spurt the darkened gore of his self-inflicted slaughter up his nostrils and out of the deadly wound.

912-915 **ὤμοι ἐμᾶς ἄτας, οἷος ἄρ᾽ αἱμάχθης, ἄφαρκτος φίλων: ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὁ πάντα κωφός, ὁ**

πάντ᾽ ἄϊδρις, κατημέλησα. πᾷ πᾷ κεῖται ὁ δυστράπελος, δυσώνυμος Αἴας; "What blind foolishness I have displayed! All alone, then, you bled, unguarded by your friends! And I took no care, so entirely deaf was I, so totally ignorant. Where, where lies inflexible Ajax, whose name means anguish?" Here, the chorus takes on the voice of the rest of Ajax's friends and community network. Too late they realize that they have ignored his suffering and did not provide him with support (see Chapter 1).

916 **οὔτοι θεατός "**must not be seen:" emphasizes the shame associated with his actions. Implies that the community should not be subjected to witnessing what has come to pass.

916 **περιπτυχεῖ** "enfolding:" imagery of Ajax being enfolded by his cloak directly contrasts with the lack of support from the community that is described in the previous lines. Rather than being surrounded by his support network, Ajax is now surrounded by a shroud. This verb has a connotes an additional meaning when referring to a person who has committed suicide: "wrapped around, impaled on" a sword or other weapon. Though Ajax does not remain impaled by his sword, this verb has the dual meaning for the covering of his corpse while also reminding the audience of how he came to die.

917 **καλύψω** "to cover up or envelop, to shroud a corpse:" repetition of covering, his body is being hidden, along with the shame of his actions and how it reflects on the community. It is worth noting that this word can have a connotation of covering either for concealment or for protection.

919 **οὐδεὶς ἄν, ὅστις καὶ φίλος, τλαίη βλέπειν** "no one, no one who loves him, could suffer to see:" those who love him in the community should not have to see him in this state, yet it is the community (represented by the chorus) who admit their own deafness to his problems as to why this situation has come to pass. The use of the senses in this selection adds vividness to the

horror of what has occurred: the scene feels tangible to the audience.

Suicide

Selection 3. Here, Tecmessa (Ajax's war-concubine) begins her monologue regarding what occurred the night before. She details Ajax's actions while he was in the throes of his madness.

Τέκμησσα		**Tecmessa**
πῶς δῆτα λέγω λόγον ἄρρητον;	215	Oh, how can I tell a tale too terrible for words?
θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον βάρος ἐκπεύσει.		You will learn about a weight as heavy as death.
μανίᾳ γὰρ ἁλοὺς ἡμὶν ὁ κλεινὸς		Glorious Ajax was seized by madness during
νύκτερος Αἴας ἀπελωβήθη.		the night, and he has been subjected to utter
τοιαῦτ᾽ ἂν ἴδοις σκηνῆς ἔνδον		disgrace.
χειροδάϊκτα σφάγι᾽ αἱμοβαφῆ,	220	All this you may see inside his
κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός.		dwelling—butchered victims bathed in blood,
		sacrifices of no hand but his.

216 **θανάτῳ γὰρ ἴσον βάρος** "grave as death, equal in weight to death:" this phrase foreshadows that Ajax's madness is as bad as death and will ultimately result in his death by suicide.

220 **αἱμοβαφῆ "**bathed in blood:" just as Ajax's animal victims are covered in blood, so too will he be after his suicide. This word is specifically used in Greek in reference to sacrificial victims. The animals have been unofficially sacrificed to Ajax's madness.

Selection 5. Here, the chorus laments Ajax's fate, detailing the impact that his downfall will have on those around him.

Χορός	**Chorus**
καί μοι δυσθεράπευτος Αἴας 610 ξύνεστιν ἔφεδρος, ὤμοι μοι, θείᾳ μανίᾳ ξύναυλος: ὃν ἐξεπέμψω πρὶν δή ποτε θουρίῳ κρατοῦντ᾽ ἐν Ἄρει: νῦν δ᾽ αὖ φρενὸς οἰοβώτας 615 φίλοις μέγα πένθος ηὕρηται. τὰ πρὶν δ᾽ ἔργα χεροῖν μεγίστας ἀρετᾶς 620 ἄφιλα παρ᾽ ἀφίλοις ἔπεσ᾽ ἔπεσε μελέοις Ἀτρείδαις.	And now a new struggle awaits me, a match with Ajax, hard to cure, living with a madness of divine origin. It is he whom in fact you sent out before as a man who was most dominant in bold war. But now he is changed; he shepherds his thoughts in isolated places and has found deep mourning for his friends. The former achievements of his own two hands, the most supreme accomplishments of his excellence, they have fallen, they have fallen, meaningless, without friends, before the miserable sons of Atreus.
ἦ που παλαιᾷ μὲν σύντροφος ἀμέρᾳ, 625 λευκῷ δὲ γήρᾳ μάτηρ νιν ὅταν νοσοῦντα φρενομόρως ἀκούσῃ, αἴλινον αἴλινον	Surely when his mother, companion of antiquity and grey with age, hears that he is sick with the ruin of his mind, she will raise a funeral lament, a death song. It is not the nightingale's piteous lament that she, unhappy, will sing. Rather in shrill-toned odes the dirge will rise, and her hands will thud as

οὐδ᾽ οἰκτρᾶς γόον ὄρνιθος ἀηδοῦς 630 ἥσει δύσμορος, ἀλλ᾽ ὀξυτόνους μὲν ᾠδὰς θρηνήσει, χερόπλακτοι δ᾽ ἐν στέρνοισι πεσοῦνται δοῦποι καὶ πολιᾶς ἄμυγμα χαίτας.	they beat her breast, and her grey hair will be torn.
κρείσσων παρ᾽ Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν,	Yes, he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades

631 **ὀξυτόνους μὲν ᾠδὰς** "piercing dirge, lament:" here, Ajax's mother cries a funeral lament, yet her son is not yet dead. At the time that this tragedy is based, it fell upon the women in a family to mourn and follow all of the ritualistic aspects that accompany death. Therefore, by Ajax's mother singing the funeral dirge, she symbolically signals that the proper rites indicating death have begun.

635 **κρείσσων παρ᾽ Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν** "yes, he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades:" this line clearly states that the community views a mad person as better off if they are dead. Given this sentiment, in some sense it comes as no surprise that Ajax commits suicide.

Selection 6. In this scene, Ajax performs his final monologue before committing suicide.

ἀλλ᾽ οὐδὲν ἔργον ταῦτα θρηνεῖσθαι μάτην, ἀλλ᾽ ἀρκτέον τὸ πρᾶγμα σὺν τάχει τινί. ὦ Θάνατε Θάνατε, νῦν μ᾽ ἐπίσκεψαι μολών. 855	But no good is done for me to weep in vain like this. No, the deed must quickly have its beginning. Death, Death, come

καίτοι σὲ μὲν <u>κἀκεῖ</u> προσαυδήσω ξυνών. σὲ δ', ὦ φαεννῆς ἡμέρας τὸ νῦν σέλας, καὶ τὸν διφρευτὴν Ἥλιον προσεννέπω, <u>πανύστατον δὴ κοὔποτ᾽ αὖθις ὕστερον</u>.	now and lay your eyes on me! And to you I will speak when I am with you. But you, beam of the present bright day, I salute you and the Sun in his chariot <u>for the last time and never again</u>.

853 **θρηνεῖσθαι** "utter a dirge, lament, wail, bewail:" the same word used by his mother in the prior selection. A form of mourning and expressing grief. This is a word that appears in the *Odyssey,* Hesiod, and numerous other works, thus bringing to mind for the audience the other scenes in which such mourning occurs. Specifically, this word is used in Book 24 when Odysseus visits the underworld to describe the Muses leading the mourning for Achilles in the *Odyssey.*[56]

854 **ἀρκτέον τὸ πρᾶγμα σὺν τάχει τινί** "the deed must quickly have its beginning:" Ajax is a man of action and even in this he wants to proceed with purpose.

855 **ὦ Θάνατε Θάνατε** "Death, Death:" vocative, repetition, personification of a deity. Ajax invokes the name of death, calling out to him before committing suicide. This type of invocation occurs similarly in the *Iliad*, Hesiod, and several others. Notably, in his *Philoctetes,* Sophocles once again has his protagonist invoke death personified in a similar manner. This usage indicates that this type of invocation would not have been viewed as abnormal.[57]

859 **πανύστατον δὴ κοὔποτ᾽ αὖθις ὕστερον** "for the very last time the last and never again:" repetition, Ajax's final line, the word choice emphasizes the finality of his action. In this line, he repeats three times that this is the last time that he will be alive to see the sun. With **ὕστερον**

[56] Homer, *Odyssey* book 24, line 61
[57] Sophocles, Philoctetes, line 797

("last") being the final word of the speech, there is a symbolic ending of speech and Ajax's life with his last word literally meaning "last."

Selection 7. In this scene, Tecmessa discovers and reacts to Ajax's body. She insists that his body must be covered because his death was suicide.

Χορός τίνος ποτ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ἔπραξε χειρὶ δύσμορος; **Τέκμησσα** αὐτὸς πρὸς αὑτοῦ, δῆλον: ἐν γάρ οἱ χθονὶ 910 πηκτὸν τόδ᾽ ἔγχος περιπετὲς κατηγορεῖ. **Χορός** ὤμοι ἐμᾶς ἄτας, οἷος ἄρ᾽ αἱμάχθης, ἄφαρκτος φίλων: ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὁ πάντα κωφός, ὁ πάντ᾽ ἄϊδρις, κατημέλησα. πᾷ πᾷ κεῖται ὁ δυστράπελος, δυσώνυμος Αἴας; 915 **Τέκμησσα** οὗτοι θεατός: ἀλλά νιν περιπτυχεῖ φάρει καλύψω τῷδε παμπήδην, ἐπεὶ οὐδεὶς ἄν, ὅστις καὶ φίλος, τλαίη βλέπειν φυσῶντ᾽ ἄνω πρὸς ῥῖνας ἔκ τε φοινίας 920 πληγῆς μελανθὲν αἷμ᾽ ἀπ᾽ οἰκείας σφαγῆς.	**Chorus** But by whose hand can the ill-fated man have brought this end? **Tecmessa** He did it with his own hand; it is obvious. This sword which he planted in the ground and on which he fell convicts him. **Chorus** Ah, what blind foolishness I have displayed! All alone, then, you bled, unguarded by your friends! And I took no care, so entirely deaf was I, so totally ignorant. Where, where lies inflexible Ajax, whose name means anguish? **Tecmessa** No, he must not be looked at! I will cover him over completely with this cloak enfolding him, since no one—no one, that is, who loves him—could bear to see him spurt the darkened gore of his self-inflicted slaughter up his nostrils and out of the deadly wound.

909 **ἔπραξε** “to perform (an action), to carry out a task, activity, to bring about (a result):”active voice; in this moment it is still unclear to the chorus who killed Ajax. It is worth noting that this verb is also used in Herodotus and others to “cause, create -slaughter or revolt.” A versatile word that had historically been used to refer to great violence.

910 **αὐτὸς πρὸς αὑτοῦ** “he did himself:” reflexive, nobody did this deed to Ajax, but rather he committed the action. In this phrase, the chorus (representing the community) reveals that Ajax committed suicide. This moment is the first time that it is confirmed to the audience that Ajax did not die in battle as would befit a warrior, but rather that he took his own life.

911 **κατηγορεῖ** “speak against, criticize, condemn, denounce, accuse:” a legal term, the sword that “condemns” him not anly provides a clue as to what happened but also the evidence that convicts Ajax of committing suicide. This verb was used in law court speeches of accusation. Specifically, the famous Athenian speech writer, Lysias, utilizes this verb in “Lysias 1: On the Murder of Eratosthenes.”

916 **οὔτοι θεατός** “he must not be seen:” shame associated with the act of suicide leads Tecmessa to try and cover her lover and hide what he has done.

920-921 **ἄνω πρὸς ῥῖνας ἔκ τε φοινίας πληγῆς μελανθὲν** “darkened gore up to his nostrils and out of the deadly wound:” graphic description of Ajax’s wound. The harshness and horror of what has happened is apparent.

921 **ἀπ᾽ οἰκείας σφαγῆς** “in self-inflicted slaughter:” though Sophocles never says the word suicide, what happened is apparent. **σφαγῆς** “slaughter” has a strong, negative connotation, rather than just being self-inflicted death, Ajax’s actions are extremely and absolutely destructive.

Further Thoughts

After translating and analyzing the seven passages discussed above, several things stood out to me: certain words were used frequently; some of the words utilized were unique to the *Ajax*; and other words brought to mind their use in other works of ancient Greek literature and additional mythological situations. These specific words were not isolated in any one passage and as such could not be fully analyzed above. In the following section, then, I discuss these aspects of Sophocles' diction throughout the tragedy.

Common Words

Throughout the *Ajax*, many Greek words repeat, most having to do with madness or a poor set of circumstances. In the seven selections that I translated, three words and one prefix reappeared more than any others: κάκη, μανιά, νοσέω, and δυσ-. Κάκη, an adjective meaning "baseness, wickedness, faint-heartedness, cowardice," appears repeatedly throughout the play. The word comes into the English language in words such as *cacophony*. The adjective occurs seven times in the seven sections that I translated (at one point reappearing three times over the course of six lines). Moreover, within the specific passage where it appears three times (selection 4), Sophocles practically hits the audience over the head with the fact that this situation is absolutely horrible, beyond simply being 'bad.' The repetition of this word, in addition to its positioning as the last word of alternating lines, emphasizes the negative aspects of what is occurring in the tragedy. Stylistically, this word choice forces the audience to acknowledge the condition of the situation that occurs on stage without ignoring the underlying tragic theme. Similarly, the prefix δυσ- conveys notions of badness, difficulty, and negativity. Δυσ can be translated as "ill-, hard-, un-, or mis-." Some English cognates that use this prefix

include dysmorphia and dyslexia. This is a serious prefix, indicating a more negative connotation for the word as a whole. The prefix appears six times in my translated sections and, in combination with κάκη, starkly and clearly emphasizes the negative emotions of the circumstances discussed in the tragedy.

The two other most common words of the play both relate to illness and madness. Μανιά and νοσέω both have numerous possible definitions, though all relate to the same core concept of being unwell in both physical and mental ways. Μανιά is the more straightforward of the two, meaning "mad or deranged" when describing a frenzy or "causing madness, maddening, or deranging" in relation to an illness. Some English cognates of this word include maniac and mania. The term νοσέω is more nuanced with four separate definitions based upon context. When related to a person's body or mind it could mean to "be diseased, ill, or sick," but when referring to to an individual's temperament it could mean to " be disordered or afflicted (with mental or emotional sickness)." Alternatively, when used of soldiers νοσέω could mean to "be weak," while with people in general it could mean to "be distressed, or suffer." In English, nosology, or the study of the classification of diseases, comes from νοσέω. In various forms, νοσέω appears seven times in my translated passages. These words indicate what madness does to a person and where it comes from. Specifically, these words highlight how mental illness affects every part of the afflicted party in addition to being a physical condition that can sometimes result from the will of the gods. In combination, both of these words highlight the core theme of madness in the *Ajax* and demonstrate how the ancient Greeks viewed madness as a physical sickness, rather than being the result of a character flaw or moral failing.

Hapax legomena

Though not common, sometimes there are words that only appear once in the entire body of ancient Greek literature. These words are known as *hapax legomena*. It is impossible to know with complete certainty whether words that only appear once truly only existed in this one location in literature or if other works in which they appeared simply did not survive to the present day. Regardless, these words bear significance in that they were likely less commonly used in the greater body of literature. Larger works such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* contain hundreds of *hapax legomena*, while other works contain none at all. Within the *Ajax*, there are several words that only appear in the tragedy: primarily words having to do with madness or suicide. It is important to note that within the seven sections of the play that I translated, I found five *hapax legomena* relating to madness or suicide. This represents a high density of *hapax legomena* in a relatively small number of lines.

Notably, three words invoking madness only appear here: ἁλίσκομαι, φρενομόρως, and δυσθεράπευτος. While ἁλίσκομαι is used elsewhere in Greek literature to describe a person or thing being captured, Sophocles alone employs this verb to indicate that an individual has been seized or overcome by madness specifically. Alternatively, δυσθεράπευτος only appears once in Greek literature. This verb means to be “hard to look after or hard to cure" and exclusively refers to Ajax as a deranged person. This term’s mere existence implies that the difficulty of caring for a mentally ill individual or someone who has experienced trauma occurred with enough frequency that Sophocles felt compelled to create a specific, precise word to describe this dilemma. The word φρενομόρως means to “destroy the mind.” That this word only appears in this work by Sophocles indicates that he likely invented this new term in order to adequately describe what his protagonist experiences. By presumably creating new words or new contexts for previously existing words in the context of madness, Sophocles makes room for greater

specificity in discussing madness and all of its symptoms. In toto, all of these words together imply a certain degree of functional impairment, which is mentioned in criterion G of the DSM-5.0 diagnostic for PTSD. Alternatively, if the words already existed, Sophocles' sole recorded usage of the words seems to indicate that madness was generally not spoken of in this way. Moreover, these words are not found in the *Iliad* even though that work similarly broaches the topic of the lives of soldiers. If these words already existed, they were not used in relation to other times when soldiers were dealing with difficult emotions (i.e., Achilles throughout most of the *Iliad*). This in itself is significant because it provides a different perspective on how ancient soldiers could have dealt with their trauma in the aftermath of battle.

Just as Sophocles is the sole recorder of several words related to madness, he also provides several unique words relating to suicide. When discussing the causes of Ajax's ultimate suicide, Sophocles describes how Ajax 'suffered complete disgrace" (ἀπολωβάομαι). While Greek contains many other words dealing with shame and disgrace, the *Ajax* provides the sole instance of this verb with its particular connotation of finality. αἱμοβαφής, meaning "bathed in blood," appears only in the *Ajax* as well. This particular word foreshadows Ajax's future state after his suicide yet also contrasts with the concept of ritual sacrifices being similarly coated in blood. Perhaps most interestingly, Sophocles uses the word περιπτυχής twice in the same line to mean two separate yet related things: first, to "enfold" a corpse when describing a shroud, and second, to be "wrapped around or impaled on (a sword)" when describing a person committing suicide. These separate definitions provide the nuance required to understand what would be occurring on stage. Great symbolism exists when considering how Ajax both wraps himself around the sword when committing suicide and then has a shroud wrapped around his body after the fact. This unique word is used twice in one line and then appears nowhere else in the

tragedy. Rather than merely using a general definition of "folded round," Sophocles expands the meaning of this term to include a more specific connotation of suicide by sword. Just as Sophocles' use of *hapax legomena* regarding madness provides greater specificity for the audience, this usage also provides a similar preciseness when discussing suicide.

Evoking Other Works and Traditions

I use similar analyses in evaluating Sophocles' use of words that evoke familiar scenes, traditions, or passages from other notable works of ancient Greek literature. Such intertextuality has the power of telling the audience something about the play or its characters without having to make an explicit reference to a different work. For example, Sophocles utilizes the word πένθος, meaning to "express one's grief, lament, mourn" when describing a dead person, one's country, or something one has lost, and to "bewail or bemoan" when describing an individual's sufferings or misfortunes. This word is used prolifically from the time of the crystallization of epic poetry throughout the body of ancient Greek literature, so it is a common enough term with regular usage. However and significantly, the word **πένθος** describes the grief felt by the Greeks in book 11 of the *Iliad* when describing the vast quantity of soldiers killed while Achilles refuses to fight.[58] Beyond that specific instance, **πένθος** appears a total of 17 times in the *Iliad.* Throughout the numerous descriptions of battles, **πένθος** frequently brings to mind the grief that comes along with death. Moreover, Penthus (Πενθος) was considered to be the personification of grief in ancient Greek society.[59] The deity of grief's name being the same as the noun to describe mourning is not a coincidence, but rather an indication of how deeply associated the word was with lamenting and grief. By using a word that historically brings to mind suffering in

[58] Homer, *Iliad*, Book 11 line 658
[59] Encyclopedia Mythica, 1997

epic poetry and that would have been very familiar to any ancient Greek audience, Sophocles evokes a greater feeling of grief and sadness than could have been achieved with different word choices.

The Nightingale Myth

In this section, I describe the nightingale myth that Sophocles mentions in line 630 (οὐδ' οἰκτρᾶς γόον ὄρνιθος ἀηδοῦς / ἥσει δύσμορος, *It is not the nightingale's piteous lament / that she, unhappy, will sing*) when describing what Ajax's mother's reaction will be when she hears about the madness that has befallen her son. The story of the nightingale has evolved and changed greatly in the course of Greek history. Originating as early as the *Odyssey*, numerous versions of the tale were told beginning circa 725 BCE and including details in Hesiod, Sappho and more.[60] Though we must work only with fragments, many general details of the myth have survived and also in some visual sources. After being raped and rendered mute by her sister's husband, Tereus, Philomela weaves her rape story into a tapestry. Realizing what her husband has done, Procne and her Philomela take revenge upon Tereus by killing his son. Following this filicide, the sisters (and Tereus) are transformed into birds, one of which is the nightingale.

Sophocles' fragmentary play, *Tereus*, details the myth of the nightingale through the story of the two sisters, Philomela and Procne.[61] While the tragedy's titular character is Tereus, the husband of Procne, Philomela, the victim of rape, is actually the protagonist of the play. Discrepancies between the titular character of a tragedy and the name of the protagonist occur occasionally (i.e. the *Antigone* focuses on the destruction of Creon despite being named for Antigone).

[60] Odyssey line 514-527: Hesiod line 568-570: Powell 2007
[61] Fitzpatrick 2001, 90-101

Considering our modern access to a limited number of ancient Greek tragedies that were once performed, it is extremely significant that Sophocles' authored both the *Tereus* and the *Ajax*. Most importantly, Sophocles utilizes imagery from one play in the other. Rather than being a coincidence, this cross pollination of ideas adds a deeper meaning and subtext to both tragedies. In the Ajax, by invoking the nightingale in Ajax's mother's lament, Sophocles almost explicitly directs the audience to recall his other work and the myth in general (thus saving him from having to repeat ideas and waste time during the performance through a lengthy explanation). In the original myth, the nightingale's song indicates a mother's mourning for her son, and so by including a specific reference to this story here, when the chorus describes Ajax's mother's future reaction to hearing that her son has gone mad, Sophocles increases the pathos of the scene and draws his audience closer to the deep trauma involved in both stories.

The story of the nightingale ultimately remains a story about the suffering of women. Arguably, this myth demonstrates PTSD from a woman's perspective due to its content being about sexual assault. By including this myth with its theme of horrific treatment of women in both of these plays, Sophocles draws an additional parallel between both of the protagonists: Philomela and Ajax. Just as Sophocles describes how a soldier deals with the trauma of war in the *Ajax*, he similarly describes a woman's response to the trauma of rape in *Tereus.*
The fact that Sophocles writes about both of these kinds of experiences may indicate that he, and his audience, understood the connection between military trauma and sexual trauma. Potentially, a link between these gendered categories was acknowledged at this time as it related to various aspects of PTSD.

Overall Conclusions

In this chapter, I have provided my own translations of seven passages from the *Ajax* in addition to analyzing the selections both thematically and philologically. The philological commentary after each passage in combination with the more detailed summary at the end of the chapter provides a guide to the original ancient Greek of the play and it sets the stage for my discussion of the scholarly analyses of the play in my next chapter. There, I will review the scholarly literature regarding PTSD in ancient Greek culture from the sixth and fifth centuries BCE in addition to works examining PTSD in relation to both ancient and modern times.

Chapter 3: Previous Interpretations of Sophocles' Ajax

Previous Scholarship on the Ajax

Having explored the relevant history and modern advances in the field of psychology and translated selected passages from the *Ajax,* I will briefly consider prior research on the intersection of the two fields. In this chapter I consider Johnathan Shay's 1994 seminal work, *Achilles in Vietnam,* as a turning point in approaches to the intersections between the *Ajax* and modern soldiers suffering trauma.[62] I devote a subsection, then, to Shay's book, and I conclude the chapter by considering scholarship after his contribution.

Pre-Shay

Prior to the publication of *Achilles in Vietnam* in 1994, most of the published literature regarding the *Ajax* primarily focused on what the tragedy revealed about the values of the Greeks at that time and how the tragedy fit into the contemporary and historical events relevant to that society. The connection between Ajax's experiences and modern psychological research was generally not acknowledged or explored. The methodology for these works typically included close readings of the original ancient Greek only in regard to the specific words and phrases relevant for the argument being formulated by the author.

In what follows, I will review several articles that span previous topics of interest regarding Sophocles' *Ajax*. Rosivach's 1976 interpretation, "Sophocles' Ajax," focuses on the awarding of the arms of Achilles to Odysseus and the effect that Odysseus's claim to the arms had over Ajax during the course of the play.[63] Rosivach wrestles with the 'rehabilitation' interpretation of the tragedy that had been discussed in prior works.[64] This interpretation centers around the idea that the tragedy ends with the Greeks recognizing Ajax's true worth and

[62]Shay, 1994
[63]Rosivach, 1976, 47-61
[64]Rosivach, 1976, 47-61, he describes this interpretation at length on pg. 47

ultimately 'rehabilitating' his image despite his prior actions. Alternatively, Rosivach's scholarship tends to focus on the values illuminated by the characters and their actions throughout the tragedy. Similarly, in his 1992 article "Sophocles' Ajax: The Military 'Hybris,'" Gasti examines the conflicting value systems that he believes are illustrated throughout the tragedy.[65] He argues that the conflict between Ajax and Odysseus represents the struggle between traditional heroic values and cooperative values.

Gasti offers a close reading of many of the same words and phrases that I presented in chapter 2. However, he focuses on their connection to changing military value systems rather than real psychological symptoms and reactions to trauma.[66] In particular, though Gasti mentions how Athena refers to Ajax's delusions in terms of madness and sickness, he instead focuses on the contrast with Ajax's own descriptions regarding possessing a 'heroic fighting spirit.'[67] Here again, the primary focus remains on what can be learned about the values of the contemporary society and how they are reflected in the piece of literature in question, rather than on the reflected experience of an actual individual in fifth-century Athens.

Similarly, many articles treating Sophocles' *Ajax* before 1994 center the tragedy in archeological and historical evidence. Notably, Evans' 1991 article "A Reading of Sophocles' 'Ajax,'" focuses on the social and political influences that connected the Athenians to the play.[68] He argues that Ajax was a character from the *Iliad* that Sophocles then took and expanded upon in the tragedy. Evans puts the play in the context of the events in the fifth century, both through a discussion of Ajax's son's citizenship and through descriptions of the Battle of Salamis.[69] Beyond contextualizing the target audience for his reader, Evans explores some of the values and

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[65] Gasti, 1992, 81-93
[66] Gasti, 1992, 86
[67] Gasti, 1992, 86
[68] Evans, 1991, 69-85
[69] Evans, 1991, 69-85

questions that would have been apparent to a fifth-century Athenian audience. Primarily centering around honor, the author explores how the situations of the play impact both Ajax and Agamemnon's honor: Ajax's loss of honor from not getting the war prizes and the implications for Agamemnon's honor if Ajax is buried with dignity.[70] Evans' discussion aims to explain some of the motives in the tragedy that might not otherwise be immediately apparent to a modern audience. These articles are all interesting and valid contributions to the body of literature, but they remain solely focused upon the role of the soldier in the larger society rather than their experience as an individual.

Shay: Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character

In 1994, Jonathan Shay, a clinical psychiatrist who had worked with Vietnam combat veterans for decades, released his seminal work, *Achilles in Vietnam*, specifically focusing on the study and treatment of PTSD. He identified a similarity between accounts in Homer and the experiences of the veterans with whom he worked every day.[71] Shay's research helped demonstrate the reciprocal connection between ancient examples and modern psychological conditions. Practically every article in the field of classics that relates even tangentially to psychology or combat trauma in soldiers now references Shay.

While Shay's groundbreaking works cover a multitude of issues related to PTSD and examples in ancient Greek literature, in this chapter I will only touch upon a few of the most relevant topics. Primarily, my interest focuses on Shay's insights into a) the perception of those with combat trauma that in some part of their story there has been a betrayal of 'what is right,'

[70] Evans, 1991, 69-85
[71] While Shay's initial article and book focused on Achilles in the *Iliad,* he has also written a book regarding Odysseus in the *Odyssey.*

and b) the general connections that Shay discovered between ancient and modern experiences in war.[72]

Shay devotes an entire chapter (his first chapter) on describing the struggle that occurs from soldiers experiencing a "betrayal of 'what's right'".[73] He compares Achilles' emotional struggle with Agamemnon taking his war prize to soldiers in Vietnam who struggled with receiving rewards for killing civilians.[74] In both situations, the soldier grapples with being faced with the reality that the world is not fair. This mirrors Ajax's experience when he is overlooked for receiving Achilles' arms following his death. Despite Achilles being Ajax's closest friend and his being the 'shield' of the Aegean army, Odysseus eloquently convinces the judges of the competition to give him the prize instead. This betrayal of Ajax serves as the precipitating factor that ultimately leads to his break from reality. Shay acknowledges that for many combat veterans, the fact that the world is perceived as unfair and full of actions that violate their personal ideals leads to feelings of being betrayed by their leaders or the circumstances in which they find themselves. These feelings of frustration and despair can ultimately further destabilize an individual in ways that extend beyond merely experiencing traumatic events.[75]

Just as I argued that community support played a significant role in Ajax's experience (chapter 2), Shay 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."[76] When a person feels like they are alone, they will often inadvertently take steps that will further their isolation. When returning soldiers are

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[72] Shay, 1994, 1-246
[73] Shay, 1994, 3
[74] Shay, 1994, 1-38
[75] Shay, 1994, 10-20
[76] Shay,1994, 4

isolated (whether in the *Iliad, Ajax,* or today) it is far harder to help them heal than when they are welcomed and supported by their community.[77] I will return to this theme in my final chapter.

Shay flows between psychological jargon and colloquial terminology easily understood by everyday people. Instead of writing for academics, his book, *Achilles in Vietnam*, is clearly meant for everyone.[78] Shay's book consists of commentaries based upon vignettes from soldiers with whom he had worked and excerpts from the *Iliad* that he contextualized. He expects the reader to have absolutely no previous knowledge regarding either ancient Greek literature or modern psychology. By relating ancient excerpts to modern comparative examples, Shay has modernized the ancient experience in a way that is easier to understand.

Post-Shay

After Shay's work revealed the potential for connection between classics and psychology, numerous additional scholars began to explore the intersections between the two fields. There is a very nuanced difference between the starting position of these scholars and the lenses that they used in this area of study and the results that stem from it. For example, some have utilized a psychological lens in order to assess historical figures thus reflecting modern psychology onto past events. Meanwhile, others have examined historical figures and events in conjunction with contemporary events as examples of modern psychological principles. Considering that the intersections of psychology and classics have become an increasingly popular area of study, in this literature review I will focus primarily on works related to the *Ajax* or works that examine the concept of PTSD in other ancient societies (with some articles naturally examining the intersection between the two topics).

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[77] Shay's other book, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, explores in detail the struggles that come along with a soldier reintegrating back into their community following the trauma of combat.
[78] Shay, 1994, 1-246

Melchior's article, "Caesar In Vietnam: Did Roman Soldiers Suffer From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," primarily focuses on the soldier's experience.[79] Melchior examines recent research on PTSD and how it interacts with what classicists do. She points out that the mental state of soldiers following their homecoming is a topic rarely found in surviving literature from the Roman world; as such, other literary sources or incidental findings must be used to attempt to reconstruct the lived experience of an ancient Roman soldier.[80] Perhaps the most important contribution from Melchior's article remains her discussion regarding competing theories about the triggers of PTSD and how those triggers would have been perceived in Roman times.[81] Melchior problematizes the practice of imposing modern concerns and beliefs onto ancient situations and people and raises the question of whether the modern idea of PTSD can even be retrojected onto historic characters. I will be addressing this argument in my final chapter, since Melchior's argument establishes a difficult objection to my approach to the *Ajax*.

Taking a slightly different perspective, Sherman, in her 2016 article "Moral Injury, Damage, and Repair," focuses more on modern situations of guilt and shame.[82] She believes that 'self-empathy' is needed to heal moral injuries that result from when "soldiers feel betrayed by command or by an ill-planned or under-resourced mission, and as a consequence feel that they have fallen short of their own reasonable standards of good soldiering."[83] Sherman relates this concept to several examples from ancient literature, particularly the story of Ajax. She believes that Ajax's response to not receiving the arms of Achilles stemmed from a general feeling of shock and shame that ultimately resulted in a generalized psychological breakdown.[84] Though she focuses on the experience of moral injuries and merely uses Ajax as a descriptive example,

[79] Melchior, 2011, 209-223
[80] Melchior, 2011, 212
[81] Melchior, 2011, 217-218
[82] Sherman, 2016, 121-154
[83] Sherman, 2016, 121
[84] Sherman, 2016, 126

Sherman does touch on the important concept of shame and how it can frequently be associated with psychological conditions. Just like many other authors studying this topic, Sherman recalls Shay in her arguments regarding shame that soldiers can experience after trauma.

In combining both psychological literature and ancient literature in his article "Combat Trauma and the Tragic Stage: Ancient Culture and Modern Catharsis," Meineck focuses on the idea of homecoming and the ways that it was perceived by all parties involved (the soldier, their family and society).[85] Rather than focusing on a single tragedy, Meineck describes how the madness of Herakles, rage of Achilles, suicide of Ajax, isolation of Philoctetes, and the trials of Odysseus all demonstrate the effects of combat trauma.[86] Strongly drawing on themes from Shay, Meineck argues that "Athenian tragedy offered a form of performance-based collective 'catharsis' or 'cultural therapy' by providing a place where the traumatic experiences faced by the spectators were reflected" by the performance on stage.[87] This understanding draws parallels between both ancient life and the narratives performed on stage and ancient and modern life regarding coping with trauma. Meineck's participation in producing these plays and drawing connections between ancient performances and modern experiences set the stage for new developments in popularizing the connections between antiquity and modernity.

The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today

Despite the numerous academic publications that have drawn connections between ancient Greek tragedy and modern life, few works, aside from Meineck's scholarship, successfully connect the general public to ancient experiences. Bryan Doerries' *The Theater of*

[85] Meineck, 2012, 184-207
[86] Meineck, 2012, 184
[87] Meineck, 2012, 185

War offers one of the rare exceptions.[88] After being exposed to the Walter Reed Scandal in 2007 regarding care for American soldiers following their return to civilian life, Doerries realized that exposing servicemen and women to ancient Greek plays could facilitate difficult conversations regarding mental health (among other topics).

Since 2009, Doerries' troupe has traveled across the country performing select passages from ancient Greek tragedies (typically selections from the *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*) for active duty soldiers, retired soldiers, spouses, military children, mental health professionals and many more. After very successful test runs, "The Theater of War" has been supported by the Department of Defense, branches of the military and various veterans services organizations. Rather than including only a performance of the passages, the performances often end with a panel of varying compositions (participants change based upon the target audience; some of the most common contributors are military spouses, veterans and mental health professionals). These panels provide audience members with a venue to discuss their reactions to the performances and how it relates to their own experiences. Common topics of discussion often relate to suicide, trauma, support systems, and the feelings of those returning from war, in addition to the experiences of those waiting to receive veterans at home.[89]

Instead of looking at ancient Greek tragedy and mental health through the lens of academia, Doerries brings ancient characters and themes into the non-academic world. His book is interspersed with select translations and testimonials from modern veterans and their families.[90] Particularly, his chapter entitled "American Ajax" contains numerous accounts of soldiers and loved ones having visceral reactions when confronted with the ancient works and how they relate to their own experiences. Ajax's story specifically served as a segue for many to

[88] Doerries, 2015
[89] Doerries, 2015
[90] Doerries, 2015

discuss their own experiences with depression, PTSD and suicidal thoughts or actions. Without prompting, many modern soldiers related to the ancient experience of Ajax and identified the same core ideas of shame, community, and suicide that I have discussed throughout this thesis.

However, there has been limited research conducted into Ajax and his experience with trauma related to war. While several authors explore the ideas of homecoming [91], shame[92], and the application of modern psychological principles onto historic figures[93], I would argue that there is still room for additions to the body of literature that examine the intersection of these concepts.

[91] Meineck, 2012, 184-207
[92] Sherman, 2016, 121-154
[93] Melchior, 2011, 209-223

Chapter 4: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Sophocles' Ajax and Modern Diagnostics of PTSD

In this concluding section, I will offer some final thoughts regarding what differentiates my work from other works in this field of study. Moreover, I will summarize my analysis of the symptoms, community perceptions, and suicide that can be found throughout the *Ajax*.

Translations

Although I have shared a general approach with many previous scholars in analyzing the ancient text extremely closely (Chapter 3), differences in my focus have resulted in a number of divergent conclusions and observations. In this section, I offer a description of my translation process. I define a close reading as a meticulous examination of the work in the original form (in this case in the original ancient Greek). From such analysis, translators create and present their own understandings of the original text. Expert translations help to provide modern audiences with deeper understandings of text and therefore also of the culture in question. Though most close translations rely on the same general methodology (i.e. translating into English using a strictly philological approach as a first step), translators also bring a number of predispositions to their work, such as knowledge bases, experiences, and rationales for translating. All of these factors influence the choices that translators make during their translation processes.

My choices and experiences have helped me to differentiate my close reading and translation from those prior translators. Translation involves just as much choice as technical accuracy, and in my translations I specifically take into account the psychological significance of certain Greek words and their relationship to modern studies of PTSD, of which previous

translators may have been unaware or which were published after their translations. In Chapter 2, I followed each section of my translation with descriptions of my translation decisions and information about the philological significance of certain words or phrases in ancient Greek that are not clearly translatable into English yet are still important to note. I provided these descriptions to illustrate to my readers that my translation of the *Ajax* combines modern psychological knowledge with ancient Greek proficiency. I have thus provided something new to the fields of translation studies and Greek philology that would not have been possible without this interdisciplinary perspective.

Retrojecting Psychological Diagnoses

As I was working on this thesis, I was confronted with the issue of the viability of retrojecting modern concepts of psychological disorders onto past time periods in which those specific diagnoses and understandings did not yet exist. In what follows, I will raise a few of the major problems involved in such retrojection. To briefly review the modern understanding of PTSD: a significant aspect of the modern diagnosis is that the individual suffering (or those around them) is distressed. In ancient Athens, if combat trauma had been viewed as a normal part of life or even something to be proud of (i.e., scars shown to prove valor or bravery in public[94]), then such combat trauma would clearly not meet the modern criteria for PTSD. A second aspect of this problem concerns the fact that even in modern times individuals can experience the same trauma and yet respond in very different ways.[95] Two individuals may be right next to each other when experiencing some sort of trauma, yet because of predispositions and a number of other factors, one of them can appear unaffected while the other develops

[94] Melchior, 2011, 213
[95] Recall earlier research cited in Chapter 1.

PTSD. What is more, even within the diagnosis of PTSD, individuals often react very differently (which is why the DSM-5.0 diagnostic criteria include a breadth of symptoms, some of which contradict each other).[96] Keeping these complications in mind, it seems impossible to conclude definitively that PTSD, as defined in modern terms, was experienced in ancient Athens (or any other ancient society, for that matter). Even so, I maintain that scholars and psychological practitioners can and should examine symptomologies recorded in ancient accounts and compare those to modern definitions of PTSD in order to better understand the possible continuities of the human experience, as I will further delineate below.

I suggest that it is permissible to examine the *Ajax* through a modern psychological lens for the following reasons. First, in the tragedy, Ajax very clearly experiences distress as a result of his symptoms. Despite refusing to speak about his experiences with Tecmessa, Ajax's monologues to the audience provide abundant evidence that he himself finds his symptoms deeply disturbing. Also, as I describe further below, Ajax's suicide in and of itself proves that his reaction to his trauma would have been considered by the contemporary Athenian audience as intense and horrific. Third, the fact that one of the most celebrated playwrights of antiquity, Sophocles, who was a esteemed military general himself in Athens for many years, staged an entire tragedy about Ajax's struggle demonstrates that Ajax's behavior was considered noteworthy enough to be written and performed for the civic dramatic festival at which the entire citizen population of Athens would have been expected to attend. There are two possible readings for Sophocles' choice of this subject: either Sophocles wanted to show Ajax's experience as a deviation from the norm of a soldier's canonical experience, or Sophocles depicted Ajax's mania as an experience shared by a number of soldiers in ancient Athens during this time period. In either reading of Sophocles' intentions (which we can never truly know), I

[96] See Chapter 1, *Symptoms*

maintain that examining Ajax's experience through a modern psychological lens is a viable and worthwhile addition to the current body of literature for the reasons listed above. Further, if we can draw continuity between ancient and modern times, then with this cross-chronological comparison, we can also open the door for modern soldiers to understand that they are not and have never been alone: rather, there is some unity in experience of military trauma across time.

Analysis: Shame, Community, and Suicide

In this section, I bring the discussion back to the general themes presented in Chapter 2 in relation to my translations: symptoms, community perceptions, and suicide. As I previously established, these categories draw upon significant psychological research (Chapter 1) and highlight the key aspects of the *Ajax* as it relates to PTSD. The aim of this section is to add more depth to the ideas initially presented in Chapter 2. Pulling information from previous chapters will highlight the key points of this work as a whole.

Symptoms

From the very beginning of the *Ajax* the audience is confronted with by the protagonist's suffering from a form of madness. In fact, two of the most common words throughout the play are the noun for "madness" and the verb for "to suffer from illness" (**μανιά** and **νοσέω**).[97] Sophocles does not shy away from describing Ajax's experience, often in vivid and explicit detail for the entirety of the play. Within the first lines, Ajax's symptoms appear, and some clearly correspond with modern concepts of PTSD. Generally, Ajax's symptoms can be categorized as increased aggression, feelings of isolation, difficulty sleeping, among other categories (all of which correspond with *DSM-5.0* criteria outlined in Chapter 1).

[97] See the *Common Words* section of Chapter 2 for a discussion of the significance of these words and their usage.

The play opens with descriptions of Ajax's slaughter of animals whom he had mistakenly believed to be his allies-turned-enemies during his fit of madness. These descriptions indicate that Ajax did not simply kill the creatures: he massacred them and tortured those that were unlucky enough to have survived the initial onslought. Though they were not actually humans, Ajax believed that they were. In other words, Ajax was hallucinating: what he saw in the animals was not reality. Despite his hallucination, Ajax's physical actions were not altered in any way. His physical attacks upon the animals were the exact actions that he had planned to take against the soldiers. Signs of Ajax's aggression thus reveal themselves immediately to the audience.

During the beginning of the play, Ajax is also referred to as "pacing up and down" (**φοιτῶντ**').[98] As a present active participle, this word indicates ceaseless continuity of movement at a time relative to the main verb. This verb was used often in Greek literature to both refer to warriors in battle (*Iliad*) and ghosts (*Iliad*, Hesiod). The audience would have been familiar with the various common connotations associated with the word. Moreover, the 'ghosts' that others have translated as haunting Ajax could just as easily be read as nightmares or hallucinations. Through this single descriptor, indications of the symptoms of both difficulty sleeping and increased agitation are apparent.

Perhaps the saddest of Ajax's symptoms is his increasing sense of isolation. Ultimately ending in his suicide, Ajax's solitude begins far earlier than the moment of his death. At one point in the tragedy, Ajax refers to himself as being **"**friendless … friendless" (**ἄφιλα … ἀφίλοις** this word can also mean "bereft").[99] In a single line, Ajax's state of friendlessness is repeated:

[98] *Ajax*, line 59
[99] *Ajax*, line 621

nobody in the audience could deny the isolated state in which Ajax found himself. This line draws clear attention to this soldier's isolation from his community and social network.

Community Witness and Community Support

Beyond the direct symptoms, Sophocles clearly communicates the impact of Ajax's mental decline on the community. The tragedy opens with Odysseus, Ajax's worst enemy, looking upon him and pitying his madness. Yet, even as a rival, when Odysseus observes Ajax's changes in personality, he is stricken with uncertainty and begins to question his own fate and that of all of humanity. Why would Odysseus' uncertainty seem striking to an Athenian audience? Odysseus canonically is single-minded in his epic mission to return home, never faltering from his end goal both in the *Odyssey* and on stage in Athenian tragedy. So, that Odysseus expresses uncertainty about life as a result of witnessing Ajax's mania would have stricken the audience immediately as out of character, thereby underscoring the seriousness of the situation. Odysseus' pity also suggests that, despite Ajax's countless contributions to his community as a soldier, Ajax's symptoms (increased aggression, feelings of isolation, difficulty sleeping etc.) result in his society viewing him no longer as the whole man that he once was, but rather as a pathetic remnant of who he used to be.[100] Not only has Ajax been disgraced (**ἀπελωβήθη**) as a result of his madness-induced actions, but he also has become a figure to be pitied rather than respected.[101] On a societal level, then, in this tragedy Ajax has lost his position within his community.

[100] Further descriptions of these symptoms within the *Ajax* can be found in "Descriptions of Madness" in Chapter 2, while the descriptions of these symptoms as related to a modern PTSD diagnosis can be found in "Symptoms" in Chapter 1.
[101] *Ajax*, line 218

As if this fall from status were not bad enough, even Ajax's own war-concubine, Tecmessa, refers to his violent outburst as "unspeakable words" (**λόγον ἄρρητον**).[102] To Tecmessa, what has befallen Ajax is too horrible even to say. Even though she has a child with Ajax and cares for him and his home, his descent into madness crosses a line beyond the personal and into the territory of taboo. Beyond Tecmessa, the greater community, represented in the play by the chorus, also finds it difficult to be around Ajax, going so far as to describe how "his presence distressed us who were sane" (**ἡμᾶς δὲ τοὺς φρονοῦντας ἠνία ξυνών**).[103] There is no doubt about the clear discontent of the community witnessing what has befallen Ajax in this tragedy.

It often falls upon the individuals closest to a returning soldier to help them adjust to their new 'normal' after experiencing trauma. Unfortunately, caring for individuals who have experienced combat can be difficult. Particularly, Sophocles describes Ajax as "hard to look after, hard to cure" (**δυσθεράπευτος**).[104] This term's mere existence in this line implies that the difficulty of caring for a mentally ill individual or someone who has experienced trauma occurred with enough frequency that Sophocles felt compelled to create a specific, precise word to describe this dilemma. The struggle of trying to treat someone who has experienced a trauma has not disappeared in modern cases of PTSD: many loved ones face a constant battle in finding ways to cope with the changes in their traumatized relatives. Just as Ajax suffers, so too do those who care for him in this play.[105] Ajax's madness is thus seen as a two-fold tragedy, as his reaction to his trauma not only harms him but also harms those within the community who witness what he suffers.

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[102] *Ajax*, line 215
[103] The focus being on the contrasting of the φρονοῦντας, or one's who have their senses, with Ajax who does not. *Ajax,* line 274
[104] This word is specifically used in reference to a deranged person. *Ajax*, line 610
[105] **ἆρ᾽ ἔστι ταῦτα δὶς τόσ᾽ ἐξ ἁπλῶν κακά;** "surely then these are two sorrows instead of one?"

Though Ajax could have benefited from support, his larger community turned their backs on him due to the distress caused by witnessing his downfall. Even his mother laments Ajax as dead, though he still lives. In fact, it is explicitly stated that "he who suffers a hopeless sickness is better when he lies in Hades."[106] It is no surprise that Ajax views suicide as his only option when his community clearly defines a mad person as better off dead. In fact, it is only after his death that Ajax's community (represented by the chorus) realize that they have failed him. After it is too late, they realize that they have ignored his suffering and did not provide him with support.

Suicide

Even in modern times, suicide plagues the ranks of active duty and retired military personel: this issue is not a new phenomena.[107] The climax of the *Ajax* focuses on Ajax's final monologue and ultimately his suicide. In this scene the audience is confronted by the harsh and gory reality of a great hero taking his own life, rather than living with the shame of what has befallen him.

Upon finding Ajax's body, Tecmessa immediately says that he "must not be seen" (**οὔτοι θεατός**) which emphasizes the shame associated with his actions.[108] She implies that the community should not be subjected to witnessing what has come to pass to the great hero and warrior. Moreover, Sophocles places special emphasis upon the covering up of Ajax's body. The word **καλύψω (**"to cover up or envelop, to shroud a corpse") repeats several times after the discovery of Ajax's body.[109] This repetition of covering demonstrates how his body must be

[106] *Ajax*, line 635
[107] See Chapter 1 for an extensive detailing of the modern issue of suicide among combat veterans
[108] *Ajax,* line 916
[109] *Ajax*, line, 917

hidden, along with the shame of his actions and how it reflects on the community. It is worth noting that this word can have a connotation of the covering being for concealment or protection. With this understanding, it is possible to read Tecmessa's actions either being to protect or conceal both Ajax and the community from what has happened.

This concealment of course does not happen. Rather, it becomes publicly known what Ajax has done (both to the characters in the play and to the audience watching Sophocles' tragedy). Though Sophocles never uses the word 'suicide,' Ajax dies as a result of "self-inflicted slaughter" (**οἰκείας σφαγῆς**).[110] Rather than just being a self-inflicted death, Ajax's actions (slaughter) are extremely and absolutely destructive. In fact, following his suicide, Ajax's sword "condemns" or "accuses" (**κατηγορεῖ**) him to all who bear witness.[111] As a legal term, the sword not only provides clues as to what happened but also supplies the evidence that convicts him of committing suicide. This verb was historically used in real law court speeches of accusation in ancient Athens contemporaneous with the production of this play. This contextualization indicates that suicide was not only considered a tragedy by ancient Athens at the time of the play's writing but was also tantamount to a criminal act. However, an important distinction between ancient and modern times in regards to suicide is that "Athenians regarded suicide as a crime committed by the instrument that the victim used, or by the victim's hand as opposed to the victim himself."[112] So, though his suicide would be considered a crime, it would not be understood with the same degree of culpability of the victim as suicide can be viewed in the modern day. Ajax's decision to commit suicide was not a socially acceptable or encouraged response as a result of his symptoms, despite the community's difficulty supporting and witnessing Ajax's actions.

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[110] *Ajax,* line 921
[111] *Ajax*, line 911
[112] Naiden, 2015, 85

Conclusions of my Conclusions

The effects of combat related trauma are shown throughout the Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*. Those closest to Ajax, the larger community, and even Ajax himself acknowledge the abnormality of his symptoms and show distress about them. Sophocles thus encapsulated the experience of ancient soldiers in a way that still rings true today. Though the manner in which wars are fought has drastically changed since 450 BCE, the experience of combat trauma and the challenges of homecoming seem to transcend time.

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Appendix: Vases Depicting the Suicide of Ajax

400-350 BCE British Museum 0508.1328

530 BCE Château-Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer “The Suicide of Ajax”