



Prosthetic imagination in Greek literature

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'Prosthetic imagination' in Greek literature¹

If 'prostheses are discursive frameworks, as well as material artefacts',² this chapter will deliberately focus on the discursive side. My aim is to investigate the 'prosthetic imagination', e.g. the ways in which 'the prosthetic' may be used as a metaphor to think about the boundaries between objects and bodies in ancient Greek literature.

'Prosthetic imagination' in the modern times has been well analysed and criticized by scholars reflecting about disabilities. According to Jain and Sobchack, the trope of prosthesis has been used from the 1990s as an improper tool for reflecting upon human-technology relationships: after the 'cyborg' trend tarnished by 'academic overuse', writes Sobchack, 'the prosthetic' is the 'new, sexy metaphor' that 'has become tropological currency for describing a vague and shifting constellation of relationships among bodies, technologies and subjectivities.'³ In her ironical critique of the trope, Sobchack draws from her own experience of a prosthetic leg to contradict fantasies that attribute to prostheses a status of quasi living and autonomous beings ('I know intimately my prosthetic leg's essential inertia and lack of motivating volition').⁴ In 1999, Jain had criticized how this idealized metaphor often masked the fact that prostheses could create alienation and deficiency rather than supplying it.⁵ In 2006 Serlin adds in 2006 that this techno-animist account of human-prosthesis relationship is perhaps another way to discriminate disabled people, by excessively emphasizing the object agency rather than the human one.⁶ These convergent critiques are then based on methodological and ethical grounds. In this very volume on prostheses in antiquity, Adams points out that 'the metaphorical use of the term [prosthesis] is somewhat confusing',

¹ I would like to warmly thank Jane Draycott for her support and for having read my paper at the 'Prostheses in Antiquity' conference, in which I was unable to take part physically. Her helpful comments were greatly appreciated. I am also grateful to Professor Nagy and the staff of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies for having provided me with ideal conditions to write this chapter.

² Jain 1999: 52.

³ Sobchack 2009: 280.

⁴ Sobchack 2009: 279.

⁵ Jain 1999: 33.

⁶ Serlin 2006: 51.

spanning not only artificial body parts, but also any machine or technology 'that intervenes in human subjectivity', like a telephone or a computer.⁷ For the theorists of embodied and extended cognition for example, a pen that allows thinking in writing, or a notebook that acts as somebody's artificial memory, can be conceived in terms of 'bodily and cognitive prosthetic'.⁸

If the prosthetic metaphor has become a trite one, that conveys an inaccurate and deformed image of the reality of prostheses, is it really wise to search for it in ancient Greek literature? Firstly, part of the methodological issue can be avoided by acknowledging the fact that although I am trying to document the existence of a metaphor in Greek poetry, I do not pretend to say anything about the actual prostheses that existed in ancient Greece. I easily admit that if a 'prosthetic imagination' impregnated ancient author's ways to describe relationships between human body and inanimate implements, this was probably detached from the prosthetic experience of Greek individuals in their daily life. That being said, what urges me to ask the question of the applicability of the prosthesis trope to ancient literature is that the oldest extant mention of a prosthesis (Pindar's first *Olympian Ode*) describes a symbiotic relationship between human and prosthesis. The aforementioned scholars assumed that this was characteristic of a modern 'prosthetic imagination' strongly associated with nowadays high-tech improvements, which they strive to deconstruct. The belief that prostheses can be a living implement enhancing the body is indeed perhaps easier to conceive at a time when double-amputee Aimee Mullins can build her fame on her rich set of prosthetic legs that allow her to be, in turn, a record-breaking sprinter (with her 'Cheetah legs'), a model (with her 'Barbie legs') or an intriguing hybrid creature in a contemporary art performance (with her 'glass legs' featured in a movie by Matthew Barney).⁹

Nevertheless I will question the explicit assumption that 'prosthetic imagination' is a topical, fashionable metaphor of our time, whose birth and flourishing are anchored in modernity and *high-technophilia*. The first claim that will be made in this chapter is that it may be traced back to ancient 'low-tech' societies. Secondly, I will argue that in this first literary testimony of a mythological prosthesis (the ivory shoulder of Pelops), Pindar draws his inspiration from what I call the 'man-weapon compound': the striking representation of weapons as animated

⁷ Adams in this volume, quoting Serlin 2006: 51.

⁸ Adams in this volume; Knappett 2005: 169; Clark 2008: 222-32; Malafouris 2008.

⁹ Sobchack 2009: 190-2.

body-incorporations in Homer. Pindar's vibrant prosthesis is, in my view, a reworking of homeric human/weapon relationship, also reinterpreted on stage by Greek tragedians about the same time. Going back to this first extant mention of prosthesis and to what I consider as its counterparts in Greek tragedy – and thus, hoping to avoid the risk of vagueness pointed out by Adams – I will defend the relevance of the 'prosthetic imagination' to ancient Greek literature. Finally this cultural 'fantasy' will be reassessed in light of its meaning and importance in Greek epics and tragedy: a response, be it ethical or not, to an irrepressible need to imagine and to stage *sympathetic* relationships between human beings and the things they live with.

On the very first prosthesis: Pindar's φαίδιμον ὄμιον

Λάμπει δέ οἱ κλέος
ἐν εὐάνορι Λυδοῦ Πέλοπος ἀποικία·
τοῦ μεγασθενῆς ἐράσσατο Γαιάοχος
Ποσειδᾶν, ἐπεὶ νιν καθαροῦ λέβη
-τος ἔξελε Κλωθώ,
ἐλέφαντι φαίδιμον ὄμιον κεκαδμένον.
Fame shines for him
in the colony of brave men founded by Lydian Pelops,
with whom mighty Earthholder Poseidon
fell in love, after Klotho pulled him
from the pure cauldron,
adorned with his shoulder gleaming with ivory.¹⁰

Pindar's first *Olympian Ode* contains the oldest mention of a prosthesis in the whole of classical literature, the mythical ivory shoulder of Pelops. The interpretation of this passage is very debated because Pindar operates just a few lines further a controversial replacement of Pelops' traditional story with another one, reflecting on the relationship between marvel and speech. Numerous scholars commented about the choice Pindar made between co-existing and sometimes contradictory aetiological myths linked with Pelops and the foundation of the Olympics.¹¹ However, the nature of the prosthesis itself may be explored further in a fruitful way. Indeed, Pindar describes a fascinating continuity between the hero's body and the ivory

¹⁰ Pindar, *Olympian Ode* 1.23–8, transl. Race, Loeb Classical Library, modified.

¹¹ Nagy 1986; Drew Griffith 2000; Patten 2009; Krummen 2014: 196-214 ; Morgan 2015: 234-240.

device that replaces the shoulder eaten by the grieving Demeter. As a gift supplied by the gods, the prosthesis is Pelops' special *arête*, the mark that makes visible a particular divine favour and destiny. The 'prosthetic imagination' may well start as early as in this first literary mention of a prosthetic device.

The prosthesis is not called by a specific noun but by the name of the missing body part (ὤμων, 'shoulder'); the dative ἐλέφαντι ('ivory') indicates its material. This formulation is close to that of Herodotus, narrating the story of the diviner Hegistratos who chose to cut off a part of his foot in order to escape from a Spartan prison and then replaced it with a prosthetic 'wooden foot' (ξύλινον πόδα, at *Histories* 9.37.4).¹² This way of naming the prosthetic device may suggest that it really becomes a part of the body, although carved in a hard and strong material. What is even more interesting in the Pindaric *Ode*, is that the prosthesis is qualified by the adjective φαίδιμος, 'shining, radiant, gleaming': this radiance comes from the white and smooth ivory, material of the gods,¹³ as is suggested by the grammatical dependence of the dative ἐλέφαντι ('ivory') upon the adjective φαίδιμον. Yet there is more than that: φαίδιμος is an epic adjective also applied to the body of the warriors in the works of Homer and Hesiod. In the *Iliad* (6.27) and in Hesiod's *Theogony* (492) warriors have 'glistening limbs' (φαίδιμα γυῖα); in the *Odyssey* (11.128), Odysseus' heroic stature is made visible through his 'glistening shoulder' (φαιδίμῳ ὤμῳ), a very close denomination to Pindar's one. Sophocles also imitates this epic designation in a fragment (453) that mentions the 'glistening shoulders' (φαιδίμοις ὤμοις) of Odysseus¹⁴. In epics, this shining appearance reveals the beauty and energy (μένος)¹⁵ circulating in the heroes' body: in the same way, the 'gleaming shoulder' of Pelops, although made of ivory, seems to be conceived as an animated part of his body.

It is also noticeable that Pindar seems to suggest that this exceptional prosthesis enhances Pelops' beauty and seductive power¹⁶. The participle κεκαδμένον means both 'adorned with' and 'conspicuous', 'excelling' because of his divine prosthesis; moreover, the regenerative experience that Pelops enjoys in the 'pure cauldron'¹⁷ of Clotho, one of the Fates that assists

¹² For other mentions of prostheses in Greek and Latin literature, see Bliquez 1996; Rose 2003: 26.

¹³ Lorimer 1936.

¹⁴ Sophocles, fr. 453 (*Odysseus wounded by the spine*).

¹⁵ Vernant 1991: 37.

¹⁶ Krummen 2014: 204.

¹⁷ 'Pure cauldron' or 'purifying cauldron', a new presentation of the cauldron that was probably meant to contrast with the soiled cauldron in which Tantalus had boiled his children. See Krummen 2014, 205-209: her

at birth, can be interpreted as a second birth rejuvenating his beauty.¹⁸ And according to whether one reads ἐπεὶ as temporal ('after') or causal ('since')¹⁹, Poseidon is said to fall in love with Pelops either *after* his body has been reintegrated or *because* he was taken out of the cauldron with an ivory shoulder. The latter version is at least as acceptable as the former, and it does very much emphasise the magnifying effect of Pelops' prosthesis.²⁰

Just after this passage, Pindar introduces the controversial verses that hint at a recantation of the traditional story: 'indeed there are many wondrous things. And yet, the words that men tell, myths embellished by varying falsehoods, beyond wording that is true, are deceptive'.²¹ Is is a way to discard this prosthetic fantasy? Is this specific passage erased by the ostentatious replacement of the dismemberment story by another narrative that starts with Pelops' abduction by Poseidon (63 sq.)?

Griffith and Nagy brought good evidence that Pindar could not discard Pelops' prosthesis, which stays a fixed element of the myth, be it at the cost of the narrative's logical coherence.²² The artificial shoulder was indeed not only a literary artefact but also a real object, a Bronze-age relic (perhaps a ram shoulder-blade) that was probably on display in Olympia during Pindar's lifetime.²³ In Pausanias' account, the shoulder blade (simply called 'bone') was said to have travelled to Troy, as a token ensuring victory for the Greeks along with Philoctetes' bow and arrows.²⁴ Several symbolic explanations of the ivory shoulder have been proposed and they led to the downplaying of its prosthetic nature: instead of an external implement, it would be a birthmark or a trace of a failed transmutation of Pelops' body into the divine substance – on the model of Demeter's scheme to immortalize Demophon, Tantalus would have only managed to transform his son's shoulder.²⁵ And yet, writes Nagy, 'just as the ivory shoulder of Pelops was on display as a centerpiece in the ritual complex of the Olympics, so also it occupies primacy of place in the aetiological complex of Pindar's

interpretation of Pindar's reworking of Pelops' myth as a new explanation of 'the traditional structure and materials of the ancient myth's restoration scene' seems very convincing to me.

¹⁸ In Lycophron's *Alexandra*, Pelops is said to be a youth twice (l.156).

¹⁹ Patten 2009: 137.

²⁰ See also Apollodorus *Epitome* 2.3: Pelops is even more beautiful (ὡραιότερος) after his return to life (ἐν τῇ ἀναζωώσει). Patten 2009: 137; Morgan 2015: 234, and note 48.

²¹ I borrow this translation from Nagy 1986.

²² Nagy 1986: 87-88.

²³ Drew Griffith 2000: 22.

²⁴ Pausanias, V, 13, 4-5.

²⁵ Drew Griffith 2000: 31; Patten 2009: 138.

Olympian 1'.²⁶ The materiality of this prosthetic relic prevents us from thinking of it only in metaphorical and symbolic terms. Ironically, the hero who founded the Olympics, and was himself the paradigm of the victorious charioteer, was a prosthesis wearer, however divine and exceptional this prosthesis was. The Pindaric description seems to have left its trace on a tradition : five centuries later, Ovid follows the first *Olympian* closely when writing that Pelops' ivory device replaces the part of his body that was missing (*ebur impositum est in usum partis non comparentis*), thus completing the body of the hero, so that it becomes again *integer*, 'intact' and 'full' at the same time (*Metamorphoses* 4. 405).

Pindar and the Epic Heritage: Body and Arms in Homer

The 'gleaming shoulder' of Pelops (φαίδιμον ὤμων) has great chance to be Homeric in its wording (*Od.*, 11.23, quoted above). Yet, Pindar injects a new meaning in this formulaic phrasing by associating this gleaming aspect with the brilliance of ivory. Moreover, in my view, the Homeric influence is probably larger than the borrowing of these two words: the body/weapon relationship may have been a model for elaborating this 'super-prosthesis' that enhances Pelops' body. The radiance of the shoulder resembles that of the weapons in the *Iliad*: the δαίδαλα made of bronze, silver or gold, that flash under the sun. These weapons are animated by the same vitality (μένος) that invigorates the heroes' bodies.²⁷ Some of them, like the arms of Achilles, possess a glistening radiance that raises a paralysing fear in the heart of his enemies.²⁸ A recurrent phrasing also attributes vitality (μένος) to spears on the battle-field, a force infused into the weapons by the warriors who manipulate them²⁹ or by a divine intervention.³⁰

This exchange of energy between the body and its 'integrated' weapon is reciprocal. The bronze of weapons can also take possession of the human body: the fantasy of a 'man of bronze', entirely merged with the metal of his weapons, permeates the *Iliad*. In book 20, according to Aeneas, the great Achilles pretends to be 'wholly made of bronze' (παγχάλκεος, 20.102). This allusion to a metallic superhuman being (maybe the first cyborg in literature) is

²⁶ Nagy 1986: 88.

²⁷ For instance *Iliad* IV, 135; VII, 252= XI, 436, etc.; see Frontisi-Ducroux 1975: 65; Longo 1996; Lissarrague 2008; Purves 2015.

²⁸ *Iliad* 22.134-136; Frontisi-Ducroux 1975: 67.

²⁹ See the comment of Eustathius on *Iliad* 4.126: the passion of the feeling person is transferred onto the weapon.

³⁰ *Iliad* 13.444 = 16.613 = 17.529; the participle μαιμών, 'quivering with eagerness' is also applied to weapons (4.126; 5.661; 14.542), see Kokolakis 1980: 90.

unique in the *Iliad*, and in the mouth of Achilles, it is sheer boasting.³¹ Nevertheless, we can note that in a general way, armour and weapons enjoy an intimate relationship with the warrior's body: 'Ni armure sans corps, (...) ni corps sans armure', as Oddone Longo sums up nicely. Even the regular soldiers have well-adjusted weapons, which perfectly match their bodies as well as their value in war: in book 14, the commanders of the Greek army exchange the soldiers' panoplies so that each of them receives the weapons fitting to his qualities.³² The defensive weapons that protect the body are like a second skin for the warrior: greaves (κνημίδες) for example, conform to the shape of the calf and ankle.³³ This poetic description finds a perfect material illustration in excavated objects, like the greaves from the tomb of Philip of Macedon at Vergina, which were adapted to fit his impaired leg.³⁴ In the *Iliad*, divine intervention also occurs, to adjust the weapons to the anatomy of their new possessors: when Hector spoils Patroclus' armour, Zeus blames him for usurping the immortal weapons of Achilles, but nevertheless adapts the armour to the size of Hector, literally to 'his skin' (Ἑκτορι δ' ἥρμοσε τεύχε' ἐπὶ χροῖ, *Iliad* 17.210). This solidarity between men and weapons is also expressed when heroes are shown sleeping, with their shield, spears and helmet laying just next to them (*Iliad* 10.75-6) or even sleeping with their armour on (*Iliad* 11.731): this is a protective measure but also proof of the inseparable relationship a warrior has with his panoply.³⁵ Scholars analyse it in terms of a *sympatheia*, a 'fellow-feeling' and strong 'affinity', which has reversible effects.³⁶ If the weapons become animated and 'attack' or 'rage' like the men who hold them,³⁷ the men can also acquire the metal qualities of their weapons: Achilles calls himself 'wholly made of bronze' (παγχάλκεος), but is also described as having 'men-slaying hands' (χεῖρας ἀνδροφόνους), as if the body parts in contact with the offensive sword melted with it.³⁸ The arm becomes the extension of the body, but the body might reciprocally be seen as the prolongation of the weapon. As Vernant put it, 'the hero's accoutrements, the prestigious arms that represent his career, his exploits, and his personal

³¹ Longo1996: 25-6 notes that such a supernatural being existed in near Eastern civilization (Nart Batradz).

³² *Iliad* 14.376 sq., 381 sq.: ἐσθλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὸς ἔδυνε, χέρεια δὲ χείρονι δόσκειν, 'good armor did the good warrior put on, and the worse they gave to the worse'.

³³ For instance, *Iliad* 11.18; 16.132; 19.370: κνημίδας καλὰς ἀργυρέοισιν ἐπισφυρίοις ἀραρυίας, 'beautiful greaves fitted with silver ankle-pieces'. Bliquez 1996 builds on the archaeological evidence of *cnemides*, to imagine what an ancient peg leg could look like.

³⁴ Pair of greaves, from Vergina, Royal Tomb II. Museum of the Royal Tombs of Aigai, Vergina, Macedonia, Greece, BM 2587.

³⁵ On the historical burial of warriors with their weapons in the iron age see Whitley 2002; Lloyd 2015.

³⁶ Longo 1996: 29; Griffin 1980: 39: 'homeric weapons sympathize with the warrior who wields them in force'.

³⁷ *Iliad* 20.399; 15.542; Griffin 1980: 34-6.

³⁸ *Iliad* 18.317 and 24.478-9.

value, are a direct extension of his body. They adhere to him, form an alliance with him, are integrated into his remarkable figure like every other trait of his body armour'.³⁹

Greek tragedy and the 'prosthetic imagination'

In extant tragic dramas, there is not any character wearing a prosthesis: 'for the mutilated limbs of tragedy, no supplement is possible', wrote Robert Drew Griffith rightly in his article 'Corporality in the Ancient Greek Theatre'.⁴⁰ Characters who would today be considered as physically impaired are lacking any kind of prosthetic aid. In Sophocles' *Œdipus at Colonus*, the blind and weak Œdipus wanders on the paths from Thebes to Athens, deprived of any artificial device helping him on his way, not even a simple stick.⁴¹ Filial love alone supplements the weaknesses of Œdipus' body: Antigone lends him her eyes (34) and she and her sister are objectified when called 'walking sticks' by Œdipus (σκῆπτρα, 848, 1109).

In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the lame hero, bitten by a snake, drags his swollen and festering foot along the ground. Critics have argued that the precision used by Sophocles to describe the wound derived from direct observation of a real wounded limb.⁴² Building on the symptoms detailed in the theatrical text, modern physicians have diagnosed an acute gout arthritis,⁴³ which occurred at a relatively high frequency in the general ancient Greek population according to Martha Rose's research.⁴⁴ She suggested that the pathetic spectacle of the abandoned hero must have been rather familiar to the fifth-century BC Athenian spectators, used to see in their daily life a variety of irregular gaits, caused by war wounds, congenital deformities or illnesses.⁴⁵ In spite of this, Philoctetes does not have any brace, crutch, cane or staff to help him walk.

However, the prosthetic dimension of his weapon, the famous bow inherited from Heracles, is notably reinforced, inasmuch as it could be used as an implement for his impaired leg. Of course, the bow is not a device that replaces his swollen and purulent foot: the destiny of

³⁹ Vernant 1991: 37.

⁴⁰ Drew Griffith 1998: 230-56.

⁴¹ For a discussion raising the question of knowing whether a stick or crutches may be considered as prostheses, see Sobchack 2009: 289.

⁴² Worman 2000; Rose 2003: 19; Miller 1944 refers to a fragment from Aeschylus' lost *Philoctetes*, which also contains medical terminology. On the Hoby Cup, a first-century AD Roman silver skyphos (National Museum of Copenhagen) Philoctetes is shown being treated by his comrades immediately after the snake bite, and as a crippled recluse sometime later (thanks to Jane Draycott for having pointed this cup out to me).

⁴³ Grassi et al. 1999.

⁴⁴ Rose 2003: 21.

⁴⁵ Rose 2003: 19.

Philoctetes is to be cured by the divine Asklepios on the field of Troy.⁴⁶ However, it is conceived as a vital prolongation of Philoctetes' hands, which is his only means for survival on the desert Lemnos. The spectacular effect of Philoctetes' gait is indicated by verbal cues: ⁴⁷ when he first enters on stage, the chorus hears a noise made by a 'mortal oppressed by pain' (203 sq.), whose walk is very tiresome and difficult. Philoctetes himself says that he crawls in pain and drags his throbbing foot behind him (290-91). It seems a reasonable hypothesis to assume that the bow was most probably an aid to help him walk and this was the choice made in a recent French production of the Sophoclean tragedy.

<Figure 1: Marief Guittier (Philoctetes) and Guillaume Bailliar (Neoptolemus) in the *Philoctète d'après Philoctète de Sophocle*, directed by Gwenaël Morin, © DR/ Compagnie Gwenaël Morin.>

In this production, which took place in Paris (Aubervilliers) and Lyon in 2006 and 2007, Gwenaël Morin managed to make visible not only the wounded foot, but also the prosthetic relationship of Philoctetes to his bow, which was staged as an unprecedented 'crutch-bow'. The prop used for the bow is a poetic, unrealistic object, which brings out the peculiarity of Philoctetes' theatrical bow. Made in wood and plaster cast, painted in white, it features a dummy arm, attached to the limb and to the string of the bow.

< Figure 2: Marief Guittier (Philoctetes) and Guillaume Bailliar (Neoptolemus) in the *Philoctète d'après Philoctète de Sophocle*, directed by Gwenaël Morin, © Marc Domage/Compagnie Gwenaël Morin. >

Bent over it, the character holds this dummy arm and uses this extraordinary bow as a crutch to facilitate his walk. When deprived of it by Odysseus, Philoctetes is effectively, though metaphorically, deprived of a part of his body.

<Figure 3: Marief Guittier (Philoctetes) and Guillaume Bailliar (Neoptolemus) in the *Philoctète d'après Philoctète de Sophocle*, directed by Gwenaël Morin, © Marc Domage/Compagnie Gwenaël Morin. >

⁴⁶ Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1437.

⁴⁷ We do not have any visual representation of a walking Philoctetes. In the extant ones, Philoctetes appears seated on a rock, with his bow lying on the ground next to him. See *LIMC*, s.v. *Philoctetes*; for example, Philoctetes on Lemnos, red-figure squat lekythos, 450-400 BC, New York, Metropolitan Museum: 56.171.58.

The director Gwenaël Morin thus managed to materialise in a prop the vital continuity existing between Philoctetes' hands and bow, as it is suggested by the very precise wording of the dramatic text. The object really becomes a metaphorical prosthesis: an arm, fixed to a bow, which complements the diminished body of the hero, though not in the way that we would expect.

The example of Philoctetes shows well how the prosthetic relationship with weapons can be reinforced in Greek tragedy. In her recent book, Melissa Mueller happens to incidentally discuss and re-affirm the relevance of this metaphor for another weapon: Ajax's shield.

*Prosthesis is an apt metaphor, in the sense that the shield is represented as being almost a part of Ajax's body, so closely identified it is with his physical self, and with his identity as the best of the Greek defenders.*⁴⁸

Here, the prosthesis is not considered literally as a replacement of a missing part of a human body with an artificial one. Underlying this statement is the metaphorical conception of prosthesis as a living extension of the body and of the self – the precise idea that modern scholars in Disabilities studies have disapproved of, but that may be still relevant to think about the relationships between individuals and objects in ancient Greece. I will show now that tragic poets staged many 'body-integrated' weapons, beyond Philoctetes' bow or Ajax's shield, which can be seen as responses to the Homeric warrior/weapon compounds, and parallels to the Pindaric description of Pelops' shoulder. Yet, the dialogical nature of theatre creates a tension between the representation of the weapon as an extension of the self, and that of a weapon perceived as an independent being that can act as a friend.

Hybrid weapons as body parts

Tragic weapons are not only designated by their expected names (for example shield, spear, or sword) but also by compounds underlining their proximity with the human body – just as Pindar and Herodotus used body part denominations to refer to the 'ivory shoulder' and the 'wooden foot' mentioned at the beginning of this paper. These compounds are all the more remarkable in that they are rather few and most often *hapax*, as though the dramatists wanted to use all the plasticity of language to suggest an exceptional intimacy between body and

⁴⁸ Mueller 2016: 222, n. 4.

object. The lexical compound seems to be the direct verbal translation of the material blending of human and thing happening in this special relationship between men and weapons.

In Sophocles' *Ajax*, the plot is based on the famous struggle for the arms of Achilles. For the Salaminian hero, it is inconceivable to live without these weapons, and his failure to obtain them is the source of an unbearable dishonour. Ajax is still, and maybe even more than ever, a warrior defined by his weapons. In the prologue pronounced by Athena, the continuity between him and his sword is suggested by the wording ξιφοκτόνους χέρας (10), 'sword-killer hands', responsible for the slaughter of the cattle that has just been perpetrated. This *hapax* sounds undoubtedly Homeric – I commented earlier on Achilles' 'men-slaying hands' (χεῖρας ἀνδροφόνους). The comparison of the two compounds reveals that Sophocles stresses even more the intimate association of arm and weapon, by explicitly alluding to the sword. Later on, the same adjective, αἶθων, 'blazing', is successively applied to the sword (αἶθωνι σιδήρῳ, 147) and to Ajax himself (ἄνθρωπος αἶθωνος, 222), who thus seem to share the same aspect and nature.⁴⁹

In *Alcestis*, Euripides uses a comparable coinage, when qualifying Apollo's hand by the compound τοξήρη (χέρα τοξήρη, 39), also a *hapax* rather difficult to translate: between Apollo *toxophoros* and his emblematic weapon, the relationship is so tight that the bow is always (αἰεὶ, 40) closely adjusted to his hand (-ήρης is a suffix deriving from the verb ἀραρίσκω), whatever use the god makes of it.⁵⁰

In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the bow is obviously a very important and famous object,⁵¹ however, it has not been stressed that it is once called φύλης νεῦρας (1005-06) by Philoctetes, at a time when he has just been deprived of his bow by Odysseus. The substantives νεῦρον and νευρά appear several times in epic poetry for the string of the bow:⁵² it is an archaic and poetic term whose first meaning, 'sinew', underlines the organic quality of the bow, made of a bull or sheep's sinew.⁵³ A bit later in the play, when Philoctetes thinks with horror that

⁴⁹ Notably, Ajax is named αἶθωνα λέοντα, 'blazing lion' in Homer *Iliad* 11.548.

⁵⁰ Thanatos questions the presence of the bow, which draws the attention of the spectators on this weapon ; see Monbrun 2007; Noel 2014.

⁵¹ See Harsh 1960; Musurillo, 1967: 121; Lada-Richards 1997; Taplin 1971 and 1978: 77-100; Segal 1980-81: 125-42; Gill: 1980; Mueller 2016: 38-9.

⁵² *Iliad* 4.122; 4.125; 15.463 and 469.

⁵³ Monbrun 2007: 48, 161.

Odysseus holds his bow in his hands, he uses the verb ἐρέσσω (1135), which means ‘to bend’; however, in tragedy, the verb can also be used for a part of the body put in quick motion – for instance a foot in Euripides’ *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (138). All these brief notations contribute to picture the bow as an organic instrument, which can be thought as a body part.⁵⁴

In *Trojan Women*, Euripides also builds up a strong relationship between Hector and his shield, an object that appears twice on stage – it is first exhibited in the chariot of war spoils, next to Andromache (568-76). It finally serves as an impromptu recipient for the dead body of Astyanax (1136 sq.). The dramatic importance of this weapon is all the more remarkable since in the *Iliad*, the shield is not the focus of great attention in Hector’s panoply. Once only, the shield is mentioned among his other weapons, and in book 7, Hector answers Ajax’s provocations by saying that he also knows very ‘well how to wield to right, and well how to wield to left [his] shield of seasoned hide’.⁵⁵ But these are the only fugitive allusions to Hector’s shield, which may imply that Euripides has deliberately chosen to highlight the use of this weapon in an innovative way. The anthropomorphic status of the shield may have been translated visually if in Andromache’s chariot, the weapons were arranged as a trophy, as has been argued convincingly.⁵⁶ Vase paintings offer us a useful visual testimony of these trophies, which consisted in the somewhat gruesome arrangement of weapons vertically, with the aid of a cruciform pole, as if they were still on the body of the warrior.⁵⁷ The poetic language also points towards this anthropomorphism of weapons: Euripides twice uses a compound (χαλκόνωτος), which literally means ‘with a back of bronze’ (χαλκόνωτον ἀσπίδα, 1136; χαλκόνωτον ἰτέαν, 1193). If this *hapax* firstly refers to the bronze cladding covering the wooden shield, it also suggests that the shield is like a protective cover, assimilated to a body part: this coinage is placed in the mouth of Hector’s mother, Hecuba, who invests the object with strong feelings of affection, after the deaths of his son and her grand-son Astyanax.

‘Prosthetic objects’ and physical continuity

To highlight the relationship of continuity between weapon and body, the tragic poets also insist on the haptic contact. The sword is firmly held in Ajax’s hand, as we have already seen with the wording ξιφοκτόνος χέρας (10). This close association started when Ajax received

⁵⁴ Monbrun 2007: 160-5.

⁵⁵ *Iliad* 6.116-18; 7.238-9.

⁵⁶ Brillet-Dubois 2010.

⁵⁷ For example, Boston Pelike, Museum of Fine Arts Inv. 1920.187, Tafel 4 in Rabe 2008; Lonis 1979: 129; see Figure 3 in Jackson 1991: 234. In his 1971 film version of Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, Michael Cacoyannis also reproduced this visual arrangement of weapons (original production by Kino Lorber Edu).

‘in his hand’ (χειρί, 661) the present of the hostile Hector – this substantive being underlined by its central position in the hexameter. In his *Philoctetes*, Sophocles develops drastically this association between weapon and hand: to Neoptolemus, Philoctetes presents the bow as the one he is ‘carrying in his hands’ (ἃ βαστάζω χερσίν, 655) – χερσίν intensifying pleonastically the verb βαστάζω, which already implies a physical contact.⁵⁸ When the hero is then deprived of his weapon, he longs for the bow and arrows (ἐμῶν ὅπλων) that he held in his ‘strong hands’ (κραταιαῖς μετὰ χερσίν ἰσχων, 1110). The climax of his despair occurs when he formally addresses to his hands and his bow, as though they formed a unity, a single section of his body that had been tragically separated by Odysseus’ theft.

ὦ χεῖρες, οἷα πάσχετε ἐν χρεΐα φίλης
νευρᾶς, ὅπ’ ἀνδρὸς τοῦδε συνθηρώμεναι (Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 1004-05)
O hands, what things you suffer in the lack of my dear
bow, forced together by this man’s order!⁵⁹

ὦ τόξον φίλον, ὦ φίλων
χειρῶν ἐκβεβιασμένον (Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 1128-9)
Beloved bow, out of my loving
hands, you were forced!

The address to his hands (ὦ χεῖρες) is an original kind of tragic lament: Philoctetes designates them as particularly outraged and spoiled by Odysseus – it is not him but his hands which ‘need the beloved string-bow’ (ἐν χρεΐα φίλης νευρᾶς) and which are deprived of their possession (συνθηρώμεναι). The second formal address is directed to the bow itself, the ‘beloved bow ‘violently snatched (ἐκβεβιασμένον) from Philoctetes’ ‘beloved hands’ (φίλων χειρῶν, 1128-1129). It is all as if Philoctetes wanted to reunite hand and bow by his lament song, notably by the repeated use of the adjective φίλον/ φίλων.

In Euripidean plays, we do not find this intense and exclusive relationship between hand and weapon: instead of it, Euripides is prone to emphasising the haptic contact of the object with several parts of the body. In his *Heracles*, the intimacy between Heracles and his emblematic

⁵⁸ The same pleonastic instance appears when Electra holds the urn supposedly containing the ashes of her dead brother (Sophocles, *Electra* 1129-1216).

⁵⁹ Trans. Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library, modified.

weapons – his famous club and the bow (which, by the way, becomes Philoctetes' bow after his death) – is first expressed by physical contact with his arms (ἐμοῖς βραχίουσιν, 1099) and sides (πλευρά, mentioned twice, 1100 and 1379). His bow and arrows protect his arms and dangle against his sides, gently beating him when in motion (ἅ πλευρὰ τὰμὰ προσπίτνοντ', 1379). But after the slaughter of his family, committed with these very weapons, Heracles legitimately wonders if he can keep them with him, or more precisely keep holding them 'in his arms' (εἴτ' ἐγὼ τὰδ' ὠλέναις οἴσω, 1381). The substantive ὠλένη is rarely well translated: ὠλένη does not mean hand or shoulder, but the part of the arm going from the elbow downwards.⁶⁰ It is recurrently used by Euripides about mothers holding their children in their arms, which suggests its affective value. Applied to Heracles and his bow, it really stresses the haptic contact and affective relationship between man and weapons.⁶¹

Euripides also highlights the physical contact between the shield and Hector's body in *Trojan Women*: Hecuba pronounces a real funeral oration for both her grandson Astyanax and the shield that holds his broken body.

ὦ καλλίπηχυν Ἴκτορος βραχίονα
 σώζουσ', ἄριστον φύλακ' ἀπώλεσας σέθεν.
 Ὡς ἡδὺς ἐν πόρπακι σὸς κεῖται τύπος
 ἵτυός τ' ἐν εὐτόρνοισι περιδρόμοις ἰδρώς,
 ὃν ἐκ μετώπου πολλάκις πόνους ἔχων
 ἔσταζεν Ἴκτωρ προστιθεὶς γενειάδι. (Euripides, *Trojan Women*, 1194-99)

O you that Hector's fair arm
 preserved, you have lost your best guardian!
 How lovely is the mark of his body upon your strap
 and the sweat on your well-turned rim,
 sweat which from his forehead Hector often in his toil
 dripped as he pressed you against his chin!⁶²

When Hecuba starts addressing the shield, we believe first that she is starting an encomiastic lament on her son Hector – σώζουσ', agreed with the feminine substantive ἱτέα, the 'wicker shield' found in l. 1193, is indeed rejected to the following line. But in fact, she addresses the

⁶⁰ For instance, the French hellenist Mazon translates by 'épaule' (shoulder) (CUF, Belles Lettres); so do Berguin and Duclos ('épaules', GF, 1966); Kovacs 'on my arm' (Loeb).

⁶¹ Euripides, *Trojan Women* 762, 1142; *Phoenician Women* 300, 306.

⁶² Transl. Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library, modified.

shield in a tragic lament that recalls that of Philoctetes mourning his lost bow. She builds a synesthetic reminiscence of Hector's intimate contact with his shield: the weapon covered his arm and leaned on his chin, so closely that it has kept the traces (τύπος) of his hand and of the sweat dripping from his forehead. By using the word τύπος, 'imprint' and mentioning the rim, part of the shield that was usually covered by a blazon, Euripides seems to allude to this traditional art of ornamentation.⁶³ But there is nothing engraved on Hector's shield: nothing but the physical and sensuous traces of his body, attesting once again a symbiotic relationship between the man and his weapon.

Reciprocal protection

As I have already suggested, the weapon that extends the body of the warrior is not an inert artefact, a simple instrument used passively. If it does not really have a life of its own, it is perceived as giving back to its possessor energy and protection.⁶⁴

The bow of Philoctetes is not only assimilated with a part of his body, but also to his only means for surviving on the hostile Lemnos: the bow *is* his food (τροφή, 953 and 1126) and his life – Sophocles plays on the homophony in the Greek language between the words βίος, 'life' and βίος, 'bow' (930-2).⁶⁵

In Euripides' *Heracles* and *Trojan Women*, the interaction between men and weapons is expressed in terms of reciprocal protection. Heracles describes his bow and arrows, scattered over the ground, after the killing of his family in such a way:

περωτά τ' ἔγχη τόξα τ' ἔσπартαι πέδω,
ἃ πρὶν παρασπίζοντ' ἐμοῖς βραχίουσιν
ἔσφρε πλευρὰς ἐξ ἐμοῦ τ' ἐσώζετο. (Euripides, *Heracles*, 1098-100)

My winged arrows and bow are scattered on the ground,
Those which before, standing by my arms,
both kept my sides safe and were kept safe by me.

⁶³ For an illuminating parallel, see Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes* 488, 521 (τύπος means imprint on blazons).

⁶⁴ Griffin 1980: 39 'homeroc weapons sympathize with the warrior who wields them in force, but the poet does not allow them to act simply by themselves'.

⁶⁵ See Monbrun 2007: 160.

This reciprocal protection is stressed by the circularity of the line 1100, where the infinitive verb σῶζειν starts and finishes the line, applied first to the objects, then to the man. The verb παρασπίζειν also has an interesting metaphorical use here: it literally means ‘to bear a shield beside’, so ‘to fight beside’ or ‘to stand by’. Therefore, it underlines the agency of the weapons, which fight beside the hero, rather than being simply manipulated by him. Moreover, the root of this compound verb, the noun ἄσπις, ‘the shield’, suggests that the bow and arrows had perhaps essentially a defensive action, protecting the sides of the hero, rather than attacking the enemy. This is a strikingly new vision of this weapon, infused with affective value, which contrasts with the Homeric one.

In *Trojan Women*, Euripides expresses the symbiotic relationship between Hector and his shield in a similar way: the object that pathetically kept the imprint of the hero’s body, protected his arm (the verb σῶζειν reappears with the participle σῶζουσ’, 1195), while being at the same time protected by his guardian (φύλακ’).

The ‘prosthetic’ weapon in tragedy: an extension of the self or an independent other?

In this last point, I will discuss the ways in which weapons seem to acquire another status, more independent than that of self-extensions. The prosthetic metaphor reaches perhaps its limits; in the end, objects are like ‘detachable prostheses’ and tragic playwrights seem to have experimented with this dramatic opportunity too. When it occurs, the separation from well-loved weapons is staged as a physical and emotional moment of crisis where the heroes are losing not only a part of themselves, but also the only *philoï* that they had.

ὦ τόξον φίλον, ὦ φίλων
χειρῶν ἐκβεβιασμένον,
ἦ που ἐλαινὸν ὀρέας, φρένας εἴ τινας
ἔχεις, τὸν Ἡράκλειον
ἄθλιον ὧδέ σοι
οὐκέτι χρησόμενον τὸ μεθύστερον,
ἄλλου δ’ ἐν μεταλλαγῇ
πολυμηχάνου ἀνδρὸς ἐρέσσει,
ὀρῶν μὲν αἰσχροῦς ἀπάτας,
στυγνὸν δὲ φῶτ’ ἐχθοδοπόν,
μυρί’, ἀπ’ αἰσχροῦ ἀνατέλ-
λονθ’, ὃς ἐφ’ ἡμῖν κάκ’ ἐμήσατ’. (Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 1128-31)

Beloved bow, out of my loving
Hands you were forced!
You look with pity, I think, if you have a mind,
upon the unhappy friend of Heracles
who shall never use you anymore,
but, in the grasp of
a cunning man you are plied instead,
looking on his shameful deceptions
and on the loathsome enemy,
who, against me, contrived innumerable
evils from shameful deeds!⁶⁶

In this formal apostrophe to the bow, Philoctetes addresses his bow as his friend (φιλός), his only companion on his desert island. His words anthropomorphise the object to the point of attributing it eyes to see (ὄρᾱς) and a conscious mind (φρένας τινας), capable of empathy for his misfortunes (ἐλαινόν). Even out of his hands, the object continues to live on and exist as an autonomous self, capable of observing and judging people. It therefore seems to acquire a proper identity, separate from that of Philoctetes.

In the case of Heracles' bow and arrows, objects seem to be doubly identified as parts of the hero's extended body but also surrogates for his lost kins (φιλοί). In a comparable lyric apostrophe to the weapons, loving words used first to qualify filial love between relatives (κοινωνία, 'embrace') are then transposed to the relationship between the hero and his weapons.

ὦ λυγραί φιλημάτων
τέρψει, λυγραί τε τῶνδ' ὅπλων κοινωνία. (Euripides, *Heracles*, 1376-7)
O painful pleasure of
kissing you, painful embraces of these weapons!

Just as Megara and her children were united in death in a 'dire embrace' (κοινωνίαν δύστηνον, 1363), Heracles and his weapons are companions of infortune (λυγραί τε

⁶⁶ Transl. Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library, modified.

τῶνδ' ὅπλων κοινωνίαι) until death do they part... In spite of his qualms, the hero will not discard his weapons after the killing but hold them again in his arms (ὠλέναις) or let them dangle against his sides, just like his children did hang onto his clothes or to his knees – the same verb, προσπίπτω is suggestively used by Euripides for the children and the weapons.⁶⁷ A *philos* in Greek, e.g. a friend or a kin, may be perceived as another self.⁶⁸ Yet, In the case of Heracles and Philoctetes, an evolution from a 'prosthetic relation' towards an affective companionship with an object conceived as a separate entity, differentiated from the self, is perceptible.

This evolution might be related to the generic nature of tragedy: as an essentially dialogical and material art form, theatre requires to build situations of exchange between two visible entities, be they human or non-human. The over-determination of form may have encouraged this experimentation of the detachment of 'prosthetic weapon' from their possessors. The objects can then be used as interlocutors of their own right. They are physically present and, at the same time, suggest the absence of any human being that could bring assistance to the distressed hero. The object's autonomy can therefore be seen as a dramatic device used to stage the solitude of the tragic hero in a more powerful way.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, I acknowledged the methodological and ethical issues aroused by a too extensive and disordered use of the prosthetic metaphor. A wide gap has opened up between the real experience of prosthetic wearers and the imaginary reconstruction of prosthesis as a body-incorporation, which does reiterate the same body as before or even enhance it. This awareness may be even more necessary when one thinks about the experience of prosthetics in antiquity: Martha Rose reminds us that 'it is difficult to believe that any prosthetic device would have been practical as well as cosmetic. Even today, with advanced understanding of pre-prosthetic preparation and a wide array of prosthetic choices, prosthetic devices are often discarded because of the great energy expenditure that it takes to use them'.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ προσπίττοντ': Euripides, *Heracles* 1379, and προσπεσὼν: 986; see also for the same action, 79; *Alcestis* 948; *Trachiniai* 762, cf. Bond, comm. *ad loc.*

⁶⁸ Aristotle *EE* 1245a29-30; *NE* 1166a 31-32; *MM* 1213a11-13; *Rhet.*, 1385b28-29; Belfiore 2000: 101.

⁶⁹ Rose 2003: 26.

However, my point was to show that the 'prosthetic imagination' is not necessarily a modern deformation, deriving from science-fiction or our current fascination for high-tech advances. The dream of a perfect replacement, restoring a body's integrity, may go back to the first extant literary depiction of a prosthesis in Pindar *Olympian I*. I also argued that Pindar's elaboration of Pelops' ivory shoulder is a creative response to the Homeric man/weapon symbiotic relationship. Concomitantly, Greek dramatists elaborated their own responses to it on the tragic stage, deepening the reciprocal and affective relationship between heroes and weapons, perhaps to the point of invalidating the 'prosthetic metaphor' to some extent. The transfer of living qualities onto the objects may go as far as granting some of them the status of *philoï* endowed with a separate identity.

This historical and literary investigation into 'prosthetic imagination' should then maybe lead to the acceptance of the independence and license of the imaginative thinking, however unsettling it can be, in regard of our rational and societal need for an authentic and scientific account of this experience of disability. The 'prosthetic literary imagination' does not speak directly of daily experience in our world. Ancient Greek literature makes this explicit: Pelops, Heracles, Ajax, Philoctetes or Achilles are not normal human beings but 'larger-than-life' heroes,⁷⁰ sometimes demi-gods that possess superhuman abilities. They enjoy an idealized and magnifying relationship with objects that extend their human agency and make them match perfectly the description of the 'prosthetic gods' of Freud:

*With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning.... Man has, as it were, become a prosthetic god. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent: but those organs have not grown on him and they still give him much trouble at times.*⁷¹

Simple human beings may only wish their 'trouble' and pain to be soothed and live normally, without being constantly concerned with their prostheses.⁷² Traditional myths and stories that convey a dream of symbiosis between humans and objects nevertheless deserve to be considered as part of the prosthetic experience, in so far as imagination and fantasy are a part of reality and contribute to shape it.

⁷⁰ Nagy 2013: 107.

⁷¹ Freud 1962 (1930): 42.

⁷² Sobchack 2009: 294.

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