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# The Horror and the Pity: *Phrikē* as a Tragic Emotion<sup>1</sup>

Douglas Cairns

## Abstract

As well as being the name of the physical symptom of shivering, shuddering, or goosebumps, the Greek word *phrikē* names an emotion that is particularly associated with automatic responses to sudden visual or auditory stimuli. This makes it especially at home in a number of specialized (ritual and other) scenarios, and helps explain its recurrent role in the ancient Greek aesthetics and literary theory, a role that illustrates the importance of the visual and the physical in ancient theories of audiences' emotional responses to the portrayal of suffering in both dramatic performance and non-dramatic narrative.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, once the true horror of what Oedipus has (unwittingly) done has become known, the Chorus sing a song (the fourth stasimon) in which they reflect on their king's status as a paradigm of the instability of human happiness – if even someone like Oedipus, the saviour of his city, can rise so high only to fall so low, which of us is not vulnerable (1186-1222)? Oedipus' own reaction to this horror is to blind himself, and his reappearance on stage, once he has done so, occasions this further reaction from the Chorus (*OT* 1297-1306):

ὃ δεινὸν ἰδεῖν πάθος ἀνθρώποις,  
ὃ δεινότατον πάντων ὅσ' ἐγὼ  
προσέκυρσ' ἤδη. τίς σ', ὃ τλῆμον,  
προσέβη μανία; τίς ὁ πηδήσας  
μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μηκίστων  
πρὸς σῆ δυσδαίμονι μοίρα;  
φεῦ φεῦ δύστην', ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐσιδεῖν  
δύναμαί σ', ἐθέλων πόλλ' ἀνερέσθαι,  
πολλὰ πυθέσθαι, πολλὰ δ' ἀθρήσασαι  
τοίαν φρίκην παρέχεις μοι. 1305

What suffering, terrible for humans to see, most terrible of all that I have ever encountered! What madness came upon you, wretched one? What divine being was it that leapt further than the longest leap on top of your unhappy fate? Alas, poor man: I cannot even look at you, though there is much I want to ask, much to hear, and much to look at; such is the shiver (*phrikē*) you cause in me.

The Chorus are still, as in their previous song, horrified by what that suffering represents, and they remain, fundamentally, sympathetic to Oedipus in his suffering. Yet Oedipus' physical appearance makes a difference: the sight of the horrible mutilation that he has inflicted upon himself (represented in the new mask which the actor will have put on before re-emerging from the stage-building) elicits a new and more physical response, one that they call *phrikē*, shivering or shuddering. This response springs from a fascination with the spectacle that Oedipus now represents and yet also entails an instinctive revulsion towards that spectacle. Oedipus is, in a

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way, an object; but also an object of pity, a human being like the Chorus members themselves. The sight of Oedipus is important, but it is not merely this that excites the Chorus' revulsion. They cannot bear to look at him (1303-4), but equally his entire *pathos* – not just the self-blinding, but the general catastrophe of which the self-blinding is the latest, most physical, and most visible expression – is “terrible for humans to see” (1297).

This scene is the point at which all the dense imagery of sight and blindness, light and darkness, insight and ignorance reaches its concrete, visual, and emotional climax, as the Oedipus who chose darkness over light as a way of avoiding sights too painful to contemplate (1371-90) nonetheless insists on making himself an object of the citizens' visual attention (1287-9; see Cairns 1993, 217-18), and the Chorus express their fascination with the horror of a spectacle they cannot bring themselves to look upon, a fate they seek to understand but can barely begin to contemplate. In the conflicting and contradictory responses of both Oedipus and the Chorus, and especially in their fundamentally visual character, there is much that has been addressed in classic psychoanalytic readings,<sup>2</sup> and much that could be taken further in approaches of that sort.

What I intend to pursue in this paper, however, is not directly indebted to that school of interpretation, though I hope that it may in some ways prove complementary to it. Instead, my focus is on the specific nature of the Chorus' emotional response, the *phrikē* that they experience on first setting eyes on the blinded king and in confronting his tragedy, the *phrikē* that makes them, momentarily, turn away.<sup>3</sup> This, as we saw, is a response with a strong perceptual element; it is above all the sight of Oedipus in his present condition that triggers it. It is a spontaneous and instinctive reaction; but it is not merely a simple reflex, because its ideational content includes the Chorus' attempt to encompass the sheer magnitude of Oedipus' suffering, together with whatever superhuman or supernatural forces may have caused it. These sensory and cognitive aspects, however, essential though they may be for the specification of the emotion in these particular circumstances, do not suffice to make *phrikē* what it is – for *phrikē* is fundamentally a physical experience, the experience of a body that shivers and shudders. In this passage, then, *phrikē* is (a) a spontaneous response to a shocking visual stimulus; (b) an interpretation of a particular state of affairs in terms of specific evaluative norms; and (c) a corporeal experience. Eyes, mind, and body are all implicated: the Chorus look, reflect, and shudder. Simply calling their response *phrikē* goes a very long way towards specifying and recreating its phenomenological character, what it feels like to be moved as they are moved by Oedipus. Whether we ourselves see the play in the theatre or merely in our mind's eye as we read, the response of this internal audience is, at least in this instance, a guide to our own.

*Phrikē* can be the name of an emotion (see below), but its primary significance lies in its reference to a physical symptom that is common to a range of emotional and non-emotional events. It belongs, in its primary sense, to the basic somatic level of emotion. Sources such as the Hippocratic corpus, other medical writings, and the collections of *Problemata* attributed to Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias all give ample evidence of its basic somatic aspect.<sup>4</sup> In medical writers, *phrikē* is

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Devereux 1973, usefully supplemented by Buxton 1980.

<sup>3</sup> For a more comprehensive account of *phrikē*, see Cairns 2013. I am grateful to Léon Wurmser for giving me the opportunity to pursue in this paper issues that I was unable to consider in that study.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Burkert 2010, 48-49. The Hippocratic corpus has 60 occurrences of the noun, *phrikē*, 36 of the verb, *phrissein* (cf. one instance of *phrikazein*), and 53 of the derivative adjective, *phrikōdēs* (plus one

especially associated with fever and cold sweats.<sup>5</sup> These sources are well-nigh unanimous in relating *phrikē* and its cognates to bodily temperature: we shudder when we are cold,<sup>6</sup> and when we shudder or shiver in other circumstances (e.g. when we are afraid, when we are suffering from various physical ailments, when we sneeze, when we urinate, after eating, etc.) variations in bodily temperature are normally also implicated.<sup>7</sup> For Galen, *phrikē* affects only the skin, whereas *rhigos*, “chill”, affects the whole body,<sup>8</sup> illustrating a link between shuddering or shivering and piloerection (a vestigial phenomenon in humans) that is frequently noted elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> and which can in turn provide a cue for comment on the occurrence of *phrikē* also in non-human animals, in both emotional and non-emotional scenarios.<sup>10</sup> *Phrikē*, therefore, is an involuntary bodily movement, one that is part of human beings’ pre-human inheritance and rooted in basic systems of bodily regulation that respond to changes in the temperature of the organism and of the environment. As a symptom of emotion, and especially of fear-like emotions, it is a member of a set of related symptoms that are also recognized in our own folk models (“I shudder to think”, “it gives me the shivers”, “he was in a cold sweat”, ‘she’s got cold feet”, “it was a chilling/hair-raising experience”), and confirmed by empirical investigation.<sup>11</sup>

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of the synonym, *phrikaleos*). In Galen, the figures are 110, 49, and 86 respectively. In the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata*, see esp. Book 8 (887b10-889b9) on chill (*rhigos*) and shivering (*phrikē* – 9 occurrences of the root; there are a further 25 occurrences elsewhere in the work). Cf. e.g. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 539-40; Plutarch, *De primo frigido* 947C for the fundamental association with bodily temperature.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 7. 4, *On Diseases* 1. 23-5; cf. Zink 1962, 19 n. 49; Berrettoni 1970, 262; Op de Hipt 1972, 210-11.

<sup>6</sup> It is, however, *rhigos* and not *phrikē* that is etymologically related to Latin *frigeo*, *frigus* (Chantraine 1968-80, 1249).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Berrettoni 1970, 263. Galen, however, insists on the existence of other causes, e.g. the application of bitter drugs (*De tremore* vii. 627. 11-629. 5 Kühn). He also distinguishes between *phrikē* and *rhigos* as symptoms of fear and as signs of physical cold (ibid., 628. 2-4); contrast [Aristotle], *Problemata* 889a15-25, on the role of bodily temperature in the emotions of fear and anger.

<sup>8</sup> Galen, *De tremore* vii. 612. 9-12 Kühn; for Hippocrates, *On Diseases* 1. 24 the distinction is simply one of degree, *phrikē* being the milder reaction. Galen, however, also notes that “all other medical writers” use the terms interchangeably (*De tremore* vii. 611. 18-612. 4). Two late sources (Palladius, *Synopsis de febribus* 24 in Ideler 1841, 117-18; Theophilus and Stephanus of Athens, *De febrium differentia* in Sicurus 1862, 30-2) confirm Galen’s view of his fellow professionals; while ancient grammarians (Apollonius Sophista, *Lexicon Homericum* 138. 32; Hesychius ῥ 299-301) regularly use the two groups of terms interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. [Aristotle], *Physiognomonica* 812b30, *Problemata* 888a38, 889a26, [Alexander of Aphrodisias], *Problemata* 2. 26; cf. [Theocritus] *Idyll* 25. 244, Plutarch fr. 73 Sandbach. Cf. the frequency of the association between “goosebumps” (UK English goosepimples) and physical cold (as also with fever and other biological functions such as sneezing) in the studies of Schurtz et al. 2012.

<sup>10</sup> S. fr. 875 Radt, [Aristotle], *Physiognomonica* 812b30 (again), Nicander *Theriaca* 721, 727, Plutarch *Aristides* 18. 2 (developing the Homeric image by which weapons and the like bristle like the fur of an angry animal), Dio Chrysostom *Oration* 58. 4, Achilles Tatius 1. 12. 3, x 14 in Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals*, [Alexander of Aphrodisias], *Problemata* 4. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Specifically on symptoms of fear, see Darwin 1889, 70-71, 346-347 (trembling), 100-1, 104-105, 291-292, 295-298 (piloerection), 291, 346-347 (temperature changes), with Ekman’s comments (in the 1998 edition) and further reading where relevant; cf. Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989, 371 (on piloerection), 479 (on changes in skin temperature); Balcombe 2010, 48 (on changes in body and skin temperature as symptoms of fear and other emotions in humans and animals); cf. also Burkert 2010, 46. For low body temperature as a metonym for fear in various cultures, see Kövecses 2000, 5, 23-4; for a survey of psychological applications of words meaning warm and cold in Greek, see Zink 1962, esp. 15-30 on “‘Kälte’ als Ausdruck einer unangenehmen Gefühlslage wie Schreck, Angst, Furcht, Entsetzen, Grauen”; cf. also Bouvier 2011. On the relation between actual physical temperature and the metaphorical concepts of emotional warmth and coldness, see Williams and Bargh 2008, Zhong and Leonardelli 2008.

In Greek as in English, however, such terms are not restricted to the labelling of physical symptoms. In the language of emotion, it is typical for the physical symptom to be used as a metonym for the emotion with which it is associated. A large number of passages illustrate this with reference to *phrikē* in Greek, but the phenomenon is at its clearest when the verb *phrissein*, “to shudder”, governs a direct object in the same way as would a verb meaning “to fear”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in a famous passage, Helen contrasts the kindness of Hector with the horror that she occasions in the other Trojans (*Iliad* 24. 774-5):<sup>13</sup>

οὐ γάρ τις μοι ἔτ’ ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ  
ἦπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν.

For I no longer have anyone else in broad Troy who is gentle or kind – all the others shudder at me.

That the verb *phrissein* in such locutions stands for a verb of fearing is particularly clear in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (415-18), where Phaedra expresses her incredulity that an adulteress should be able to conceal her guilty conscience from her husband:

αἶ πῶς ποτ’, ὦ δέσποινα ποντία Κύπρι,  
βλέπουσιν ἐς πρόσωπα τῶν ξυνευνετῶν  
οὐδὲ σκότον φρίσσουσι τὸν ξυνεργάτην  
τέραμνά τ’ οἴκων μή ποτε φθογγὴν ἀφῆ;

How, oh Cyprian, mistress of the deep, can they look their husbands in the face and not shudder at the darkness, their partner in crime, or at the timbers of the house, lest they at some stage speak?

The fact that *phrissein* is here followed not only by a direct object, but also by a noun clause of the sort that regularly specifies the propositional content of a verb of fearing indicates that ‘shudder’ here is a simple metonymy for “fear”; shudders as such have no propositional content.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of emotional symptoms in the construction of emotional concepts underlines the fundamental importance of physical embodiment in the concept of emotion itself. In the case of *phrikē*, the symptom is one that has its roots in basic somatic mechanisms of temperature regulation, that is manifested in a range of non-emotional contexts, and that is shared with other animals. From these materials, universal in humans and extending beyond the human species, is constructed an emotional concept in which physical symptoms are intimately related to cognitive appraisals and evaluations. The mechanism by which this occurs is the universal one of metonymy, by which the name of the symptom comes to function as

<sup>12</sup> For this phenomenon, cf. Apollonius Dyscolus, *De constructione* 413. 5-415. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. (among a large number of parallels) Aeschylus, *Seven* 720-1, Euripides, *Cyclops* 320, *Hippolytus* 855, Sophocles, *Antigone* 997, Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1132-3. The same phenomenon is observable when the noun, *phrikē*, governs an objective genitive, as at Euripides, *Ion* 898, Plutarch, *Timoleon* 22. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Odyssey* 23. 216, where the verb in question is *rhigein*. The response on which Phaedra comments in the hypothetical adulteress, of course, involves a failure to experience the guilty fear of exposure that Phaedra herself would feel in such a situation; thus, though still a form of fear, *phrikē* is here implicated in a scenario that also encompasses prospective and retrospective shame. On this aspect of the wider context, see Cairns 1993, 321-40.

a name of the emotion. The concept of *phrikē* is typical in locating the language and thought of emotion in embodied physical experience. There is nothing in any way surprising or unfamiliar about this – the point is precisely that ancient Greek emotional concepts are, to large extent, built up out of the same materials as our own, materials that draw on our experience as physically embodied beings interacting with our physical and social environments. What needs to be emphasized, however, is that this experiential, embodied nature of emotion is not just an aspect of a shared biological substratum; it is a feature also of language and of thought. It is not that embodiment is relevant only in terms of emotions' physical changes, symptoms, and expressions and is left behind when emotional concepts take root in language, thought, and culture. There is no disjunction, but rather a fundamental continuity between emotions as physical experiences and emotional concepts as linguistic and cultural categories. In terms of the development of emotional concepts, there is no wedge to be driven between the body, on the one hand, and language and culture on the other. Attention to these wider aspects of emotion language (beyond the semantics of emotion-words themselves) not only accords due recognition to the role of embodied experience but can also provide better evidence of a culture's phenomenology of emotion, getting us as close as we can get to a culture's attempt to encapsulate subjective emotional experience in language.<sup>15</sup>

A fundamental aspect of that phenomenology in the case of *phrikē* is its regular association with immediate, automatic, and instinctive responses to direct and often sudden visual or aural stimuli. The Aristotelian *Problemata* discuss *phrikē* as a spontaneous reaction to various unpleasant sounds (886b9-11, 964b34-37), a reflex that is then explicitly explained in terms of fear, on the basis that such sounds are instinctively regarded as signs of impending trouble (887a 1-3).<sup>16</sup> This particular association between *phrikē* and immediate visual or aural stimuli is widely confirmed,<sup>17</sup> and is reflected in the way that the adjective *phrikōdēs* very often qualifies sights and sounds: though many of these passages include a reference to the ominous connotations or negative import of the sights or sounds in question, it is clear that in many cases the adjective also highlights the capacity of the stimulus to elicit an instinctive emotional response. Plutarch, for example, uses *phrikōdēs* of the deep and horrific roar, the low and terrible tone, a mixture of bestial roaring and the clap of thunder, produced by the Parthians' percussion instruments as they face the Romans in battle, commenting that the Parthians have clearly understood the impact of such sounds on the emotions and morale of their opponents (*Crassus* 23. 8-9).<sup>18</sup> In the

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Burkert 2010, 54.

<sup>16</sup> The relation of the startle reflex to the emotion of fear is similarly in question at 964b22-29, where the *phrikē* caused by being touched by another person is explained in terms of the fear aroused by what is sudden and unexpected.

<sup>17</sup> The link with vision is esp. frequent in Plutarch's *Lives*: see *Alexander* 74. 6, *Aratus* 32. 3, *Cicero* 49. 2, *Marius* 44. 9, *Numa* 10. 6; cf. *phrissein* and cognates + participle of a verb of seeing, e.g. Aeschylus, *Supplices* 346, *Prometheus Vincit* 695. For *phrikē* as a reaction to loud, sudden, uncanny, or unexpected noises, cf. Cassius Dio *Historia Romana* 48. 37. 2 Boissevain (cf. 36. 49. 2); Philostratus, *Heroicus* 748. 14-17.

<sup>18</sup> Again, parallels are very numerous. See for example Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1201-2 (sounds of supernatural origin), 1215-16 (ditto), *Andromache* 1147-8 (ditto), Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1335-6 (ditto), [Aristotle], *Mirabilia auscultationes* 843a15-16 (the mere sight of waves in the Straits of Messina), Apollonius Rhodius 4. 1339-42 (sound as sign of danger), Plutarch, *Marius* 19. 1-20. 3 (the groans and lamentations of their defeated opponents echo through the hills at night and terrify the Romans), *Sulla* 14. 3 (the sound of trumpets and horns; cf. Pollux 4. 85: *phrikōdēs* a good epithet for the sound of the trumpet), Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 4. 286-287 (thunder), 6. 2 (the sight of piles of corpses), 6. 83-84 (the sight of one centurion's prodigious massacre of the enemy), Plutarch, *Comparatio Lysandri et Sullae* 2.

*Oedipus* passage with which we began, the Chorus' sudden shock at being confronted by the site of their once-revered king, now horribly mutilated, is fully in keeping with these connotations of *phrikē*.

*Phrikē*'s associations with unexpected and unsettling visual stimuli, however, also make it an especially appropriate response to epiphany, quasi-epiphany, or other presumed signs of divine presence – another relevant aspect of our tragic passage, in which the Chorus' questions focus specifically on the daimonic origins of Oedipus' sufferings. A heavenly light, for example, occasions *phrikē* before the divine in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (4. 2. 15),<sup>19</sup> and *phrikē* is the reaction of the audience to the illusion of divine presence or possession created by the Sicilian statesman, Nicias, in Plutarch's *Life of Marcellus* 20. 8.<sup>20</sup> The relevant terms are also used of reactions to the supernatural communications believed to occur in dreams,<sup>21</sup> or to a variety of miracles, portents, and omens.<sup>22</sup> In such contexts, *phrikē* often connotes awe and deference as much as fear,<sup>23</sup> and it is in this sense that sacred places, such as temples and shrines, are said to attract it.<sup>24</sup> In connexion with the divine, then, *phrikē* has as much to do with *sebas*, a type of awe or respect that responds to legitimate status and authority,<sup>25</sup> as it does with simple fear of unpleasant consequences. It is in this respect

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4 (the sight of slaughter), Lucian, *Philopseudes* 22 (the Gorgon-like aspect of a female monster), Achilles Tatius 3. 17. 7 (the sight of Leucippe emerging, mutilated but alive, from her coffin). In these *phrikē*-causing sights and sounds the element of fear, or at least of the unnerving or uncanny, is prominent; Greek writers seem not to present *phrikē* as a response to stirring or awe-inspiring sights or sounds (such as works of art or pieces of music) as such; contrast the subjects investigated by Schurtz et al. 2012, and cf. Keltner and Haidt 2003, 300-1, 303-4, 306-7.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the shudders that respond to epiphany at Hesiod fr. 165. 4-5 M-W and to the divine sign from Zeus that marks Oedipus' heroization at *Oedipus Coloneus* 1606-7, though in both these places the verb employed is *rhigein*. For the "holy shudder", cf. esp. Burkert 2010, 50-4; also Keltner and Haidt 2003, 298-9, 308-10 on awe and religion. Only a very small number of respondents in the survey of Schurtz et al. 2012 refer their goosebumps to religious experiences (p. 209); but (as the authors note, p. 210) this may simply reflect the limited scope for profound religious experiences in the lives of typical US college students over the four-week period of the survey.

<sup>20</sup> For *phrikē* in the context of quasi- or assumed epiphany (i.e. when the appearance or behaviour of a mortal suggests or is assimilated to epiphany), see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19. 344-345 (the quasi-epiphany of Agrippa in the theatre), Plutarch, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 343E (the appearance of Alexander as quasi-epiphany), *Aratus* 32. 1-2 (a captive girl in a warrior's helmet taken for an apparition of a goddess).

<sup>21</sup> See Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 3. 353, Plut. *De superstitione* 165F, Philostratus, *Heroicus* 666. 6-8, Achilles Tatius 5. 25. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Again, the basic phenomenon goes back to Homer (*Iliad* 12. 208-9, a physical shudder at the sight of an omen, though the verb there is *rhigein*), but Plutarch proves especially rich in instances: see *Aemilius* 17. 8 (eclipse), *Agessilaus* 24. 5 (daylight as quasi-divine sign, associated with Eleusis), *Sulla* 11. 1 (an omen that takes place in the theatre), *Timoleon* 12. 9 (the *phrikē* and wonder, *thauma*, of the people of Adranum when, at the beginning of Timoleon's battle against Hicetas of Leontini, the gates of their temple spontaneously flew open to reveal the cult-statue's spear-tip trembling, sweat running down the god's face). For "wonder" as a stock feature of epiphanies, often coupled with "fear", see e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 3. 398, *Odyssey* 1. 322-3, 3. 372-3, 16. 178-9, 19. 36-40, *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 134-135, *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* 81-90; cf. Richardson 1974, 208-9; Faulkner 2008, 164.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Cornutus, *De natura deorum* 11. 3-18; Julian, *Contra Heracleium* 8. 14-17, *Epistulae* 89b. 169-75.

<sup>24</sup> See Demosthenes 23. 74 (of the Delphinion, the court with jurisdiction over justifiable homicide, *qua* holy place); Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 4. 181-182, 6. 123; Plutarch, *Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus* 21. 5; NB esp. Pollux 1. 23, where *phrikōdēs* appears after "august", "god-filled", and "numinous" in a list of appropriate epithets for temples. This basic, instinctive response to the awesomeness of the numinous as such is attested (albeit with the verb *rhigein*) as early as the shudder with which Ajax looks upon the works of the gods at *Iliad* 16. 119-20.

<sup>25</sup> See Cairns 1993, 137-8, 157, 206-14. On occasion, *phrikē* can also express awe or deference towards human superiors (e.g. Euripides, *Troades* 1025-8, Plutarch *Demosthenes* 20. 3, *De Alexandri magni*

that *phrikē* is associated with the institution of the oath, a ritual that publicly puts at stake the honour both of the human actors and its divine guarantors in an often elaborate and solemn ceremony involving prescribed roles and formulas. To be sure, in this context *phrikē* remains, at bottom, an instinctive and involuntary emotional response, but its association with the oath reminds us that such responses are regularly embedded in highly structured and specific cultural practices.<sup>26</sup> A large number of passages from the Imperial Period and later make this link,<sup>27</sup> but the association between the oath and the physical reaction that *phrikē* represents is as old as Greek literature itself, as we see in the case of Priam's shudder (with the verb *rhigein*) in response to the request that he perform oath-sacrifice at *Iliad* 3. 259.<sup>28</sup> To be sure, the oath entails frightening consequences in the event of its breach,<sup>29</sup> but is also an institution in which status and prestige (Greek *timē*) is deeply implicated – that of the god is invested in the solemnity of the ritual itself and that of the human participants is committed to its maintenance.

Emotional *phrikē*, then, is not always fear or a symptom of fear; occasionally it can be associated with apparently quite different emotions,<sup>30</sup> but even when it does belong with fear-like emotions its connotations can be more specific. Though it can be associated with institutions, rituals, and scenarios that are deeply embedded in specifically Greek cultural norms, it retains its basic rootedness in the body and its sensations, specifying an immediate, instinctive, and occurrent form of emotional experience. It is, one presumes, precisely in order to retain such connotations, to conjure up something of the experience of emotion rather than merely labelling it, that language makes use of metonyms of this sort in the first place. When Sophocles' Chorus refer to the *phrikē* that Oedipus occasions in them, therefore, they are referring to an involuntary, physical response. This is a response such as one would feel if one were very cold, one that is allied to feelings of fear and revulsion occasioned, on the one hand, by the sudden and shocking sight of Oedipus' physical mutilation, but also by their reflections upon actions which are at once the most

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*fortuna aut virtute* 331F). On Eng. awe as a social emotion, and especially on its positive aspects, see Keltner and Haidt 2003, Schurtz et al. 2012, 210-16. For Keltner and Haidt 2003, 306-7 awe towards social superiors is the emotion's "primordial" form, the application to elicitors in the natural world, art, or music a secondary development. Schurtz et al.'s investigation of the physical symptom of "goosebumps" likewise concentrates on social factors (for which their respondents did indeed provide much evidence). But the rootedness of such symptoms in evolutionarily old capacities that humans share with other species might suggest a different evolutionary hypothesis, less specifically focused on human social hierarchies.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the deliberate arousal of the initiand's *phrikē* in mystic initiation, esp. at Plutarch fr. 178 Sandbach (from *On the Soul*), a scenario that lies behind Plato's account of the lover's vision of Beauty Itself at *Phaedrus* 251a. As a response to the sanctity, solemnity, and power of the ritual, the link between *phrikē* and the mysteries is attested throughout antiquity and beyond: cf. Demetrius, *De elocutione* 101, Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2. 133, Lucian, *Juppiter tragoedus* 30, Aristides, *Hieroi logoi* 2, 297. 20-21 Jebb (cf. 256. 24, 320. 5). *Phrikōdēs* and the like are frequently used in Christian writers' representations of Christian dogma and practice, esp. the sacrament, as mysteries.

<sup>27</sup> See e.g. Philo Judaeus, *De decalogo* 141. 3, Josephus, *Vita* 275, *BJ* 2. 139, [Clement of Rome] *Homiliae* 5. 5. 2, Plutarch, *Alexander* 30.11, Arrian fr. 94. 2-3 Jacoby (with stress on sanctions for perjury), Pollux 1. 39, Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* 8. 36. 29 Boissevain, Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4. 13, and so on into the writings of the Church Fathers and beyond (e.g. x 7 in John Chrysostom, x 4 in Palladius).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *rhigistē* of the oath sworn by the Styx at Apollonius Rhodius 2. 291-2; more remotely, *rhigistos* of Zeus Hikesios, Apollonius Rhodius 2. 215.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. curses at Plutarch, *Crassus* 16. 7, *Timoleon* 5. 3, Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 2, p. 599. 9-11; magic spells: Lucian, *Philopseudes* 31.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. intense, quasi-erotic joy, at Sophocles, *Ajax* 693.



heinous of transgressions and the most shocking indication of human vulnerability to suffering. That suffering is now compounded in a horrific act of self-mutilation which (the Chorus assume) must be divinely inspired, as were the parricide and incest that preceded it. Precisely because their description of their reaction conveys such a pronounced sense of its phenomenology, audiences ancient and modern attain a more vivid and immediate understanding of what it might be like to be in their shoes. This understanding may itself reinforce an analogous reaction on the audience's part.

Some of the issues raised by this passage are addressed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In a characteristic passage of the important Chapter 14 (on the best type of tragic plot), Aristotle reflects on the importance of plot construction *vis-à-vis* visual spectacle (*Poetics* 14, 1453b1-7):

ἔστιν μὲν οὖν τὸ φοβερὸν καὶ ἔλεινόν ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως γίνεσθαι, ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πρότερον καὶ ποιητοῦ ἀμείνονος. δεῖ γὰρ καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ὄραν οὕτω συνεστάναι τὸν μῦθον ὥστε τὸν ἀκούοντα τὰ πράγματα γινόμενα καὶ φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων· ἅπερ ἂν πάθοι τις ἀκούων τὸν τοῦ Οἰδίπου μῦθον.

Pity and fear can derive from the visual (*opsis*), but also from the arrangement of the incidents itself, which is preferable and the mark of a better poet. For the plot ought to be so composed that, even without seeing a performance, one who merely hears what happens will shudder and feel pity as a result of the events – as indeed one would on hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*.

This passage contains the only instance of *phrikē* in the *Poetics*. The evidence considered above would suggest that Aristotle chooses the verb *phrissein* over, say, *phobeisthai* (as one would expect given his repeated use of *phobos* and *phoberos* elsewhere in *Poetics*) precisely because the topic is the relative power of spectacle: that spectacle can produce *phrikē* is, given the term's connotations, uncontroversial, but Aristotle wants to insist that even this quintessentially instinctive response to immediate and unexpected visual stimuli is better produced by means of the plot, for which performance is unnecessary. Aristotle's example is the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which spectacle does play an important role in the *phrikē* expressed by the Chorus in the scene discussed above. As a practitioner, Sophocles might have wanted to insist on the interaction of plot and spectacle to a greater extent than Aristotle does. But the Chorus' (and by extension the audience's) response in the *OT* is clearly not *simply* a product of visual effects; it depends on a reflective evaluation of a structured series of actions that does indeed, in many respects, correspond to the pattern commended in this chapter of the *Poetics*.

Aristotle was not the first to give *phrikē* a role in poetics. At some point in the fifty years or so before Aristotle's birth (in 484 BCE), the Sicilian philosopher and rhetorician, Gorgias, expressed what are, in some respects, similar ideas, in a playful composition written to demonstrate his ability to argue any case, even one as difficult as the exculpation of Helen of Troy. Part of this case involves the argument that persuasive speech is irresistible (*Helen* 8-14), and the prime example of such persuasive speech is poetry (*Helen* 9):<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> On this passage, see Segal 1962, esp. 105-7, 121-2, 124-5, 127-8, 131-2; Halliwell 2011, 274-5, 280-1; cf. Heath 1987, 7; Munteanu 2012, 40-2.

τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον· ἧς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήης, ἐπ’ ἄλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἢ ψυχῇ.

All poetry I regard and describe as speech with metre. Into those who listen to it comes a fearful shuddering [*phrikē*] and a tearful pity and a longing that loves to lament, and at the success and failure of others' affairs and persons the soul undergoes, through words, a certain experience of its own.

Like Aristotle, Gorgias is concerned with an audience's emotional engagement with the changing fortunes of others; his core emotional responses are Aristotle's pity and fear; and he emphasizes the power of these emotions with reference to physical symptoms and expressions (tears and *phrikē*). But Gorgias differs from Aristotle in one explicit detail, in so far as he emphasizes the compulsive emotional power of *opsis* (*Helen* 15-19) as well as that of *logos*. Both, it emerges, persuade in similar ways: as the speech of astronomers persuades by making "what is incredible and obscure apparent to the eyes of opinion" (*Helen* 13), so *opsis* "engraves images of the objects of vision on the mind" (*Helen* 17).<sup>32</sup> This difference of emphasis thus takes us back to Aristotle's point: both seeing and hearing involve the formation of mental images, and thus poetic speech alone, without *opsis*, is perfectly capable of arousing in the hearer the kind of emotion that *opsis* might arouse in the spectator.<sup>33</sup>

Both Gorgias and Aristotle, in fact, draw on the implicit poetics of earlier, pre-dramatic Greek poetry. In the Homeric poems, song is presented as something that derives from (*Iliad* 2. 484-7) or at least resembles (*Odyssey* 8. 491) eye-witness knowledge: Homer's Demodocus was not present at Troy, and neither witnessed the events he narrates nor heard about them from someone who did; but someone who was present, Odysseus, is able to offer a unique guarantee of the bard's powers of representation.<sup>34</sup> That both audiences and authors revelled in such capabilities is demonstrated by the pervasive tradition of *ekphrasis*, the vivid, quasi-pictorial representation of a scene, person, animal, or object (not just a work of art) that appears already as a deliberate *tour de force* in the Shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18. The capacity that allows a reader or hearer to form mental images from a verbal narrative the Greeks called *phantasia* and we call imagination; its counterpart in the text, and in the repertoire of skills which create the text, is *enargeia* (sometimes also *emphasis* or *saphēneia*), "vividness".<sup>35</sup> *Enargeia* remained an aspiration of wordsmiths and a core term of the literary and rhetorical critic's art throughout antiquity, but for Greeks of all periods its unsurpassed master was Homer. An ancient scholar's note on the famous passage of *Iliad* 6 in which Hector reaches out towards his baby son, only for the child to shrink back in fear at his helmet, is a typical example: "Children do cling to their nurses and are hard to wrench away from them. But in this case the sight

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Halliwell 2011, 280-1; Munteanu 2012, 45-7.

<sup>33</sup> See Munteanu 2012, 47 on this passage and 95-100 on the importance of *phantasia* (imagination) in Aristotle's approach to emotion, in everyday scenarios as well as in response to drama and poetry. On the truth of Aristotle's insight, that emotional responses to imagined scenarios are as fundamental in life as in literature, cf. Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, 197.

<sup>34</sup> See De Jong 2001, 214-15; Serra 2007, 34; Halliwell 2011, 85-6.

<sup>35</sup> On *ekphrasis*, *enargeia*, and *phantasia*, see Webb 2009. On *enargeia*, see Zanker 1981; on *phantasia*, Rosenmeyer 1986; Watson 1988; Manieri 1998; Halliwell 2002, 308-12; Serra 2007.

frightens him too. These lines are so full of *enargeia* that you don't just hear what's happening, you see it as well."<sup>36</sup>

Though Gorgias and Aristotle stand – for us – at the beginning of the tradition of Greek literary aesthetics as a formal discipline, the tradition in which they themselves exist is already one which makes no absolute distinction between the effects of visual (dramatic) versus verbal representation. Although ancient Greek authors regularly comment on the greater power and persuasiveness of what one sees with one's own eyes by comparison with what one merely hears about,<sup>37</sup> it seems to have been an implicit ideal of Greek narrative to efface the distinction as far as possible. In both cases one's powers of *phantasia* are engaged. In both, one's response is typically emotional. And in both, the emotional response in question may have a pronounced somatic aspect that underlines the phenomenological continuity between narrative representations, dramatic representations, and the emotion-eliciting scenarios of everyday life. In all these respects, ancient aesthetics – both explicit and implicit, and especially the aesthetics of epic and tragic poetry – can be regarded as early contributions to current debate on a range of related issues: the central position of imagination among the cognitive capacities to which verbal and visual narratives appeal;<sup>38</sup> the continuity between the cognitive and affective capacities enlisted by narratives and those that serve us in our quotidian lives as social creatures;<sup>39</sup> the similarity between verbal and visual narratives in the way that they exploit these capacities;<sup>40</sup> and on the role of the body in the affective responses of audiences.<sup>41</sup>

The *phantasia* that is engaged by the *enargeia* of ancient Greek narratives takes a wide range of forms, both in theory and in practice; but its character, as emphasized by 'Longinus', the author of *On the Sublime* (15. 1-2), is typically emotional: one feels something like what a participant or an eye-witness would feel. The example that Longinus himself gives is of Orestes' vision of the Erinyes in Euripides' *Orestes* (255-7) and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (291): only Orestes sees them, but the poet himself has imagined what Orestes sees, and thus succeeds in making the audience feel as though they see the Erinyes too. In this case, the

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<sup>36</sup> Σ bT on *Iliad* 6. 467. Cf. Richardson 1980, 277-80, with further examples; Snipes 1988 on similes; Bakker 2005; Slatkin 2007; Graziosi and Haubold 2010, 23-4.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Heraclitus B 101a DK, Herodotus 1. 8. 1, Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3. 11. 1. It is characteristic that the Herodotus and Xenophon passages make use of the trope of the superiority of autopsy over hearsay in order to elicit *by means of a* verbal narrative a visualization of the primary viewing experienced by a figure *in* the narrative. On the Xenophon passage, cf. Goldhill 1998.

<sup>38</sup> See Tooby and Cosmides 2001; Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, 187-204; Boyd 2009, 47-8, 155-8, 188-9, 197-8, 202-3, 382-3; Dutton 2009, 58-9, 103-14, 173, 200; J. Carroll et al. 2010; Smith 2011, 109-11; Oatley 2011, 16-21 and *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Palmer 2004; Zunshine 2006; McConachie 2008; Boyd 2009, 141-9 and *passim*; Dutton 2009; Currie 2010, esp. 93-106, 109-22, 199-216; Leverage et al. 2011; Oatley 2011, 2012, 154-62; Smith 2011, 111-13.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Plantinga 1999; Coplan 2006; Dutton 2009, 127-34; Smith 2011; more generally, the cognitive-science approach to fiction reflected in the works cited in n. [39] typically makes liberal use of both literary and cinematic narratives.

<sup>41</sup> Much of this research focuses on forms of emotional contagion, mimicry, and mirroring in response to facial expressions and other visible expressions of emotion: see e.g. Plantinga 1999; Smith 2003, 265-6; Coplan 2006; McConachie 2008, 92-8; Boyd 2009, 103-4, 142, 163, 191-2; Smith 2011, 101-2; N. Carroll 2011, 178-80; Oatley 2011, 111-14. Decety and Meltzoff 2011 (among others) argue for a link between these phenomena and "mirror neurons" (on which see Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia 2008; Iacoboni 2008, 2011). For Coplan 2006, 35, such responses are possible only in response to direct sensory stimuli; but see Oatley 2011, 112 for evidence that blocking the reader's facial expression inhibits emotional responses to written texts.

audience's emotion (the *ekplēxis*, 'stunned amazement',<sup>42</sup> that Longinus regards as the typical outcome of poetic *phantasia*) arises from the poet's imaginative recreation of the experience of the protagonist and his successful communication of that recreation to the audience. The example chosen is from drama; but stage performance, if it is presupposed at all, is not mentioned; all stress is on the words.

In Plato's *Ion*, the eponymous rhapsode eagerly expresses his assent to Socrates' suggestion (*Ion* 535b-c) that those, like Ion himself, who perform the Homeric poems (and thus 'stun' their audiences: ὅταν εὖ εἴπῃς ἔπη καὶ ἐκπλήξῃς μάλιστα τοὺς θεωμένους, 535b)<sup>43</sup> are subject to a divinely inspired form of ecstasy, analogous to that of the inspired poet himself, that allows them to enter into the events that they narrate (*Ion* 535c):

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλείνῳν τι λέγω, δακρῦων ἐμπίμπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί· ὅταν τε φοβερὸν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἴστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδία πηδᾷ.

For whenever I tell of a pitiable event, my eyes fill with tears; and whenever I narrate something frightening or terrible, my hair stands on end out of fear, and my heart leaps.

Though the term *phrikē* is not used, this is what Ion's piloerection points to.<sup>44</sup> Ion himself makes no distinction between narrative and direct speech, but to the extent that the experiences he describes are appropriate to the characters portrayed in the poems that he performs, the substantial portion of the Homeric texts that is character-speech is not an irrelevant consideration: in his delivery of both narrative and character-speech, Ion will be both narrator and performer; in both capacities, his recitation involves an element of identification with the poem's characters in their reactions to the events narrated. In a very real sense, his physical presence as performer helps to suggest the phenomenology and physicality of the characters' emotions.<sup>45</sup>

Clearly, characters within a narrative can and do feel pity for others and fear for themselves; but these (especially pity) are also, already in Plato's day, the characteristic emotional responses of audiences, as the passage from Gorgias' *Helen* quoted above indicates.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, Ion's emotional reaction is also that of the audience (535d-e):

Σω. οἴσθα οὖν ὅτι καὶ τῶν θεατῶν τοὺς πολλοὺς ταῦτα ταῦτα ὑμεῖς ἐργάζεσθε;  
Ἴων. καὶ μάλα καλῶς οἶδα· καθορῶ γὰρ ἐκάστοτε αὐτοὺς ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος κλάοντάς τε καὶ δεινὸν ἐμβλέποντας καὶ συνθαμβοῦντας τοῖς λεγομένοις.

Soc. So do you realize that you rhapsodes produce these same effects on most of the spectators too?

<sup>42</sup> On *ekplēxis*, see Halliwell 2011, 229-31 (on Aristotle), 332 (on Longinus); see also Heath 1987, 15-16; like *phrikē*, this term is instructive on the phenomenology, and especially on the perceived intensity, of the emotions experienced by poetic audiences.

<sup>43</sup> On this passage, cf. Halliwell 2002, 213-14 n. 19.

<sup>44</sup> On the link between this passage and Gorgias, *Helen* 9, cf. Halliwell 2002, 77 n. 14, 218.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Halliwell 2002, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Heath 1987, 11-16; Halliwell 2002 *passim*, esp. 100, 208-13, 218-19; Munteanu 2012.

Ion. Yes, I am very well aware of that: every time it happens I look down on them from the platform above and see them weeping, with fear in their eyes, sharing my amazement at what's said.

The passage is thus subject to several tensions: Ion is a narrator of the actions of others, but also (especially, one might think, when performing direct character-speech) something like an actor, engaging in direct representation of the story's characters. At the same time, Ion himself embodies aspects of an audience's reaction to the doings and sufferings of the characters. The audience's reaction mirrors his, but it is not clear whether the response of either Ion or his audience is (to borrow terms from Keith Oatley) an empathetic one (feeling with), in which the audience identifies emotionally with the characters and recreates, at least to some extent, their first-person perspective, or a sympathetic, third-person response (feeling for) in which the audience experiences distinct emotions of its own, elicited by but not identical to the emotions of the characters.<sup>47</sup> The issues which might interest us in this regard remain largely unexplored, because the dialogue's explicit emphasis is elsewhere: on the status of poetry as a third-hand derivative of reality (535a); on its negative effects on audiences (535d); and on its inability, as a form of inspiration rather than a skill (536a-d), to give a rational account of its subject-matter (536e-542a).

A striking incident in Josephus' narrative of Rome's Jewish wars raises similar issues. During the siege of Jerusalem, a starving woman cooks and eats her own son in a desperate attempt to avenge herself upon the Jewish guards whose depredations have reduced her to this level; the guards who see what she has done are transfixed with horror, *phrikē*, at the sight (τοὺς δ' εὐθέως φρίκη καὶ παρέκστασις ἦρει καὶ παρὰ τὴν ὄψιν ἐπεπήγεσαν, *BJ* 6. 210),<sup>48</sup> but as the news spreads through the city, all those who hear it visualize and shudder at the event as if they had committed it themselves (καὶ πρὸ ὀμμάτων ἕκαστος τὸ πάθος λαμβάνων ὥσπερ αὐτῷ τολμηθὲν ἔφριπτε, 6. 213). The internal auditors recreate the act in their mind's eye; their powers of *phantasia* lend the event a vividness that elicits the same kind of spontaneous, involuntary, and physical response as was experienced by those who actually did witness it. The reaction of the eye-witnesses is one of horror and revulsion; but the secondary audience, in some sense, imagines something of what it would be like to perpetrate such a thing. There is still revulsion, but the suggestion of putting oneself in the place of Mary, the perpetrator, facilitates another response, of sympathy. Accordingly, when the news reaches the Romans, though some are incredulous and many filled with even greater loathing for the Jews than they had hitherto felt, others feel pity (6. 214). Josephus' wider narrative of the episode concentrates on the extremes of suffering to which human beings can be reduced (6. 201-5, 213) and presents Mary herself a victim of others' greed and cruelty (6. 202), her cannibal feast a desperate protest against their inhumanity (6. 207, 211). Thus the imaginative identification with Mary that is attributed to those who first hear the report of her deed and the pity that is the response of at least some of the Romans act as cues for the responses that Josephus' vivid and artfully constructed narrative is intended to arouse in its readers. The emotions of the latter, then, are guided first of all by the vividness of the narrative itself, then by the responses of internal eye-witnesses, and then by two distinct sets of internal auditors. In this case, though (at 6.

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<sup>47</sup> For the terms, see Oatley 2011, 115-20; on empathy versus sympathy cf. various authors in Coplan and Goldie 2011.

<sup>48</sup> *παρέκστασις* (found in one MS and printed by Niese) occurs only here; all other MSS (and testimonia) have *φρενῶν ἔκστασις*.

213) the internal audience's picturing of themselves in the agent's shoes has a strong emotional component, this does not entail feeling what the agent felt, but rather recreating the agent's point of view as part of a *third-person* response to the act – all the emotional responses adumbrated in the text (whether horror, revulsion, hatred, or pity) are third-person, onlookers' responses, and so is the hypothetical sympathy of the reading audience.<sup>49</sup>

It is common (and correct) to emphasize the influence of the theatre, and specifically of tragedy, on such passages (see Chapman 2007), but as we have seen the vivid presentation of action and emotion as if before the eyes of a listening or reading public is a staple of Greek poetics and rhetoric from their very beginnings. The centrality of pity to an audience's responses to serious poetry, too, is implicit in the poetics of the *Iliad* and explicit in the earliest formulations of Greek philosophical poetics. The ability to feel this pity, according to Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, depends on a sense of the vulnerability that we share with those who are suffering (*Rhetoric* 2. 8, 1385b13-33, 1386a25-29). Similarly self-referential is the fear that in both *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* is said to derive from the sense that such things might also happen to us (*Poetics* 13, 1453a4-6; cf. *Rhetoric* 1386b27-29, where the things we pity in others are said to be the kind of things that we fear may happen to ourselves).<sup>50</sup> Shared vulnerability to vicissitude is a condition for pity both in traditional Greek ethics and in the implicit aesthetics of poetic texts. The *locus classicus* is the encounter between Achilles and Priam in *Iliad* 24. 485-551, in which Priam appeals to Achilles to release his son's body for burial. Priam first seeks to elicit Achilles' sympathy by comparing himself with Achilles' own father, but Achilles realizes that the parallel is in fact closer than Priam suggests. As a result, he goes on to deliver an elaborate speech of consolation in which he presents suffering as the lot of all mankind, using both Priam and his own father as examples of great felicity undercut by extreme suffering in old age.<sup>51</sup> Among several salient and authoritative statements of the same principle in (especially Sophoclean) tragedy,<sup>52</sup> Odysseus' reflections on the madness and degradation of his enemy, Ajax, are perhaps the most memorable. The goddess Athena, who has deflected on to the army's flocks Ajax's murderous attack on the Greek leaders, toys with her humiliated victim and invites his rival, Odysseus, to gloat. But Odysseus takes an entirely different view (*Ajax* 121-6):

ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν  
 δύστηνον ἔμπαρ, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ,  
 ὀθούνεκ' ἄτη συγκατέζευκται κακῆ,  
 οὐδὲν τὸ τοῦτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦμὸν σκοπῶν.  
 ὀρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν  
 εἶδωλ' ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν.

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[What you say is true,] but nonetheless I pity him in his misfortune, even though he is my enemy, because he is yoked to dire ruin. In this I look out for

<sup>49</sup> On pity as characteristic of an observer's perspective, see Halliwell 2002, 215-16; cf. also Konstan 2001 (with Cairns 2004) on classical pity and emotional distance.

<sup>50</sup> On the role of fear for oneself in Aristotle's conception of pity see Konstan 2001, 130-6 with Cairns 2004, 66-7; on the relation of pity to fear in Aristotle's conception of tragic emotion, see Halliwell 1986, 168-202; 2002, 216-18.

<sup>51</sup> On the importance of this passage and its ethos in the Greek narrative tradition, see Cairns 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Philoctetes* 501-6, *Oedipus Coloneus* 566-8; Euripides, *Hecuba* 282-7. Beyond tragedy see Bacchylides 5. 155-62 (esp. 160-2 and cf. 89-92); Herodotus 1. 86. 6, 7. 46. 2; cf. Pelling 2005, 289, 291-2 on Plutarch.

my own situation no less than his, for I see that all of us who are alive are nothing more than apparitions or fleeting shadow.

Similarly, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the pity that the Chorus and others feel, despite their revulsion, for Oedipus, complements the Chorus's authoritative presentation (in the fourth stasimon) of his career as a paradigm of the shared human vulnerability on which pity rests, and is thus crucial in guiding and conditioning the response of an external audience.<sup>53</sup> The same seems to me to be true of their *phrikē* in the passage with which we began – their horror at Oedipus' suffering is a prerequisite for the recognition that his suffering differs in degree but not in kind from that which might befall any of us. The use of *phrikē* of a response that is both sympathetic and fearful is apparent in other passages. In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, for example, the leader of the female Chorus deploys the term in her response to Heracles' sufferings in the poisoned shirt of Nessus (1044-5):

κλύουσ' ἔφριξα τάσδε συμφοράς, φίλοι,  
ἄνακτος, οἷαις οἶος ὦν ἐλαύνεται.

I shudder when I hear our king suffering like this, friends; what terrible afflictions for a man like him.

So too do the female Chorus in expressing their sympathy for the persecuted cow-maiden, Io, at *Prometheus Bound* 687-95:

ἔα ἔα, ἀπεχε, φεῦ·  
οὔποθ' <ὄδ'> οὔποτ' ἠὔχουν ξένους  
μολεῖσθαι λόγους ἐς ἀκοὰν ἐμάν,  
οὐδ' ὄδε δυσθέατα καὶ δύσοιστα 690  
†πήματα λύματα δείματ'  
ἀμφήκει κέντρῳ ψύχειν ψυχὰν ἐμάν†.<sup>54</sup>  
ἰὼ [ἰὼ] μοῖρα μοῖρα,  
πέφρικ' εἰσιδοῦσα πρᾶξιν Ἰοῦς. 695

Ah, keep away, oh! I never, ever thought that words so strange would come to my hearing, or that sufferings, outrages, terrors so hard to look at and to bear would chill my soul with double-pronged goad. Ah, fate, fate, I shudder as I behold Io's plight.

The movements and gestures that accompanied Io's opening words at 561-88 will have made her physical torment visible to both the internal and external audiences. In the ensuing scene, and especially in the narrative of her persecution at 640-86, she emphasizes her sufferings and presents herself as an appropriate recipient of pity; indeed, pity is a response that she herself expects (684-5). The leader of the Chorus of

<sup>53</sup> Pity: 1194, 1211, 1216-21, 1286, 1296, 1299, 1303, 1347; revulsion: esp. the Chorus at 1217-18, 1297-9, 1303-6, 1348, all, significantly, associated in context with their pity; cf. Creon at 1424-31. On the "hermeneutic" function of the choral voice in the fourth stasimon, see e.g. Calame 1999, 139; for the same general phenomenon (internal audience response guiding external) in Plutarch, see Pelling 2005, 282-3.

<sup>54</sup> The transmitted text is unsatisfactory for metrical and syntactic reasons, but the sense is not seriously in doubt.

Oceanids has specifically requested the “pleasure” of a full report of Io’s sufferings (631-4), and the Chorus’s pity is cued when Prometheus then encourages her to comply, on the grounds that “to weep away and lament away one’s misfortunes is worth the effort, when one is likely to win a tear from listeners’ (638-9). The audience is thus primed to see the Chorus’s response as sympathetic, and they are not deceived – the Chorus do recognize the extremity of Io’s situation.<sup>55</sup> But the sympathy that is implicit in that recognition is also mixed with personal distress. Like the Chorus of Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, with whom we began, the sufferings of another person both compel their attention and overwhelm them, so that they can hardly bear to contemplate the other’s pain.<sup>56</sup> In this passage, understanding of another’s emotional distress produces self-focused anxiety more obviously than other-concern – there is pity, but also fear.<sup>57</sup>

Both Heracles and Io are onstage; the Choruses in question respond to sufferings presented before their eyes and compounded by the lamentations of their patients. But similar responses can also be attributed to characters within a verbal narrative, as in the case of two passages in Plutarch’s *Life of Aemilius Paullus*. The Homeric theme of the mutability of fortune is central both to this *Life* and to the pair that it forms with the *Life of Timoleon*;<sup>58</sup> the specific debt to Homer in the *Life of Aemilius* in particular is advertised at the emotional climax of the work (34. 8), where Plutarch narrates the reversal that struck Aemilius at the very pinnacle of his success. Aemilius is the conqueror of Perseus, the last of Alexander’s successors as king of Macedonia, but the triumph in which this crucial stage in Rome’s rise to dominance is celebrated is undercut by the death of two of the general’s sons, aged 14 and 12, one five days before the triumph and the other three days after it. For the narrator, this is the work of that daemonic force, whatever it may be, whose business it is to ensure “that no one’s life should be unsullied or without admixture of trouble, but that, as Homer says, those may be regarded as best off whose fortunes shift in the balance, now this way, now that”. For the Roman people, however, the vulnerability of all human beings to vicissitude is occasion for *phrikē*: they “all shudder at the cruelty of Fortune, that she did not scruple to introduce so much sorrow into a household so admired, so full of joy and sacrifices, or to mix laments and tears together with victory paeans and triumphs’ (φριζαι την ὀμότητα τῆς τύχης ἅπαντας, ὡς οὐκ ἠδέσατο πένθος τοσοῦτον εἰς οἰκίαν ζήλου καὶ χαρᾶς καὶ θυσιῶν γέμουσαν εἰσάγουσα, καὶ καταμειγνύουσα θρήνους καὶ δάκρυα παιᾷσιν ἐπινικίοις καὶ θριάμβοις).<sup>59</sup> This vulnerability is explicitly a phenomenon that unites the victors and the vanquished: Aemilius’ defeated opponent, Perseus, is as much a paradigm of the mutability of fortune as is Aemilius himself (26. 4-12, 27. 4-5, 33. 6-8, 37. 2). The vulnerability that is demonstrated by military defeat is similarly the focus of *phrikē* at

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Griffith 1983, 211: the lyrics “give voice to the horror and sympathy which the audience must by now feel”.

<sup>56</sup> For this reaction, cf. Decety and Meltzoff 2011, 76; Hoffman 2011, 250-1 (in Coplan and Goldie’s 2011 collection on empathy).

<sup>57</sup> Griffith 1983, 212, and Podlecki 2005, 182, both note that the rhythms of the choral lyric in 687-95 are similar to those of Io’s entrance-song at 566-608 – a formalized representation of emotional mirroring?

<sup>58</sup> See Swain 1989; Tatum 2010; Cairns 2014.

<sup>59</sup> On this passage, see. Pelling 2005, 209, and cf. 280-3 on quasi-tragic narrative patterns in Plutarch’s *Lives*. Among pre-Christian (non-medical) authors Plutarch is by far the most prolific user of *phrikē*-words (143 instances of the noun; 43 uses of cognate terms). The qualities of *phrikē*, as I have outlined them above, chime very well with his predilection for vivid narrative, dramatic changes of fortune, and moralizing on the ways in which his subjects’ lives exemplify recurrent human types and patterns.



*Aemilius* 29. 5: booty from the sack of the cities of Epirus produces no more than eleven drachmas per soldier, so that “everyone shuddered at the outcome of the war, that the division of an entire nation’s wealth should yield so little profit and gain for each individual” (φριζαι δὲ πάντας ἀνθρώπους τὸ τοῦ πολέμου τέλος, εἰς μικρὸν οὔτω τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον λῆμμα καὶ κέρδος ἔθνους ὅλου κατακερματισθέντος).

In each of these four cases, the dramatic and the narrative, *phrikē* responds to the misfortunes of others, uniting both the fearful sense that we ourselves are as vulnerable as they are and a sympathy that is born of that very recognition. This union of fear for oneself and sympathy for others, together with the central focus of these emotions on the mutability of fortune, echoes some of the central tenets of Aristotle’s theory in the *Poetics*, demonstrating how widespread these assumptions are in Greek literary culture. In each of these cases, too, an internal audience experiences an emotional reaction with all the phenomenological connotations of *phrikē* that we have explored above, a reaction that is clearly meant to stand in some relation to the potential responses of the external audience. Internal and external audiences in some sense feel the same emotion. But it does not seem to be true to suggest that the external audience is catching the *phrikē* of the internal or that the latter is caused by former. The conditions that evoke the *phrikē* of the internal audience are clearly sufficient to evoke the same feeling in the external audience, and the emotional response of the internal audience is in no way the focus on which the emotion of the external audience rests. The external audience is not feeling with the internal, imaginatively simulating or reconstructing their first-person response. These are third-person, onlookers’ responses in each case; the external audience replicates the response of the internal, but each remains the response of an audience to the emotional plight of a third party. In so far as the emotions of internal and external audiences are the same, this is a matter of their converging on the same object, though it is entirely possible that the emotion of the internal audience may serve to prime, focus, or reinforce the response of the external audience.<sup>60</sup> In this respect, the reaction of a character or a Chorus in tragedy or the point of view of a character in a narrative operate, in a sense, like the point-of-view or reaction shot in cinema – the eliciting conditions for the relevant emotional response are contextually and situationally established, but the facial expressions of onlookers prime and steer the audience’s reactions to those elicitors.<sup>61</sup> The *phrikē* of an internal audience in tragedy or in narrative constitutes a reflection, in the text itself, of the relation of the text and its performance to an audience; it offers a perspective on the text’s emotion-eliciting power.

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<sup>60</sup> On the general issues here, see N. Carroll 2011.

<sup>61</sup> On the cinematic technique and its implications, see Plantinga 1999; Coplan 2006; Smith 2011; N. Carroll 2011, 179. On point of view more generally as a form of priming or framing, see Currie 2010, 87-107, 123-66. A substantial difference between classical tragedy and modern cinema in this respect is that the latter, given large screen projection and pervasive use of close-ups of facial expressions, offers (at the least) much more scope for emotional contagion. Tragedy is masked, gesture was probably stylized, and the size of the theatre also makes a substantial difference. For the dependence of emotional contagion (unconscious mimicry and feedback) on “direct sensory input” see Coplan 2006, 35 and cf. n. [41] above.

Empathy is a slippery and multivalent term.<sup>62</sup> But if, as some claim,<sup>63</sup> it requires the adoption of another person's first-person perspective and/or experiencing, from that first-person perspective, the emotions that another person feels, then the external audiences of the ancient Greek dramas and narratives that we are considering do not empathize with these internal figures whose point of view helps to steer their responses: the internal viewer feels *phrikē*, and the external audience may feel *phrikē*, but the latter's *phrikē* is not a matter of their identifying with or being affected by the emotional reaction of an internal focalizer. Nor is the ideal response of an external audience typically represented as empathy with the focal characters whose suffering elicits the *phrikē* of both internal and external audiences. Though there is regularly, as we have seen, an element of generalization that extrapolates from the suffering of the character to the kind of thing that might happen to anyone, and though one might adopt a view of the sufferer as a human being like oneself, still the characters' experience is not that of their audiences, internal or external. They are suffering; Choruses, focalizing characters, and external audiences do not feel what they are feeling, but feel, as Gorgias so aptly put it, "a certain experience of their own", not (for example) anguish, grief, remorse, or shame, but (for example) fear, pity, or *phrikē*.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, characters in a drama or a narrative can be afraid, shiver, or shudder, and an audience may do so along with them – this is perhaps an element in the passage from Plato's *Ion* considered above. But this is not the type of response that is considered characteristic of poetic audiences: when *phrikē* appears as an aesthetic emotion, it is typically an observer's response, not a vicarious first-person one. It is not, in Sophocles, Oedipus' *phrikē* that elicits that of the Chorus or the audience, and even those who, in Josephus' narrative, imaginatively recreate Mary's cannibal feast before their eyes, as if they themselves were its perpetrators, nonetheless react to the event in a way that Mary herself did not. As Halliwell puts it (2002, 216): "When we feel pity, we do not share the sufferer's subjectivity: however much we may draw emotionally near to it, or move vicariously with its psychological expression, we remain, *qua* feelers of pity, outside the immediate, 'first-person' reality of the pain, whether physical or mental." This is a significant fact about ancient Greek aesthetic and poetic theory. Though contemporary approaches also have much to say about sympathetic responses of this sort, it is also typical for them to emphasize the potential for identificatory or empathetic responses of various sorts, to a much greater extent than do ancient Greek texts, which make no grand claims about feeling what other people feel.<sup>65</sup>

*Phrikē* is by no means ubiquitous as a tragic emotion, but nonetheless, when it occurs in that connection, it is informative about the nature of tragic emotions. Though typically a symptom of fear, horror, or revulsion, it can be an expression of that link between these emotions and the shared sense of vulnerability that gives rise to pity. Its nature as an involuntary, instinctive response especially to immediate visual and aural stimuli, together with its fundamentally somatic character, help us to

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<sup>62</sup> A complaint of several contributors to Coplan and Goldie 2011 (see pp. xxxi, 4, 31-2, 103, 162-3, 211, 319); cf. Stueber 2012, 55.

<sup>63</sup> Hoffman 2011, 231; Engelen and Röttger-Rössler 2012, 4; Walter 2012, 10; Preston and Hofelich 2012, 26; Bischof-Köhler 2012, 40-1. Cf. Giovanelli 2008 and 2009 on empathetic identification as an element in sympathy, with criticism by N. Carroll 2011, 180-4.

<sup>64</sup> On the echo of Gorgias's formulation (others' affairs arouse an emotion that is one's own, *Helen* 9) in Plato's *Republic* (606b), see Halliwell 2002, 77; 2011, 267 n. 9.

<sup>65</sup> For scepticism about "empathy", in so far as it is said to involve emotional matching, feeling the emotions of others, simulating others' mental states, and so on, cf. N. Carroll 2011; Goldie 2011, 302-3 and passim; McFee 2011, 193, 197, 201; Morton 2011, 319, 325.

put some phenomenological flesh upon the bare bones of “pity and fear” as the typical tragic emotions. Its immediacy, in turn, and especially its association with the visual, can serve to illustrate the premium placed on vividness and visuality by authors, consumers, and theorists of ancient Greek narratives, and thus also illustrates the continuity between narrative and dramatic genres as objects of ancient literary theory. Though actors as well as observers can experience *phrikē* as a response to the terrifying or horrific, what we might call “tragic” *phrikē* tracks the tragic emotions of pity and fear as characteristically third-person, observers’ responses to suffering, and thus corroborates the general emphasis of ancient Greek aesthetics on sympathy over empathy, on feeling for rather than feeling with. But although in this way (and in many others) the concept of *phrikē* is deeply enmeshed in the cultural specifics of ancient Greek societies, it nonetheless possesses a core that cannot be relativized, a rootedness in the physicality of human emotion and an origin in our pre-human biological inheritance; when the Chorus express their *phrikē* at Oedipus’ self-blinding, we know what they mean. This is the difference that *phrikē*’s phenomenological richness makes: even if (and this is debatable) such a full-blooded, somatic response is less frequent in our own emotional repertoire as readers, theatrical audience-members, or cinema-goers (or if our cultures have taught us to find our frissons in somewhat different aspects of the relevant art-forms), still we all know what it is like to shudder or shiver; and thus we can approach, at least to some degree, something of the characteristic emotional tone at which ancient authors were aiming.

Whatever he meant by the enigmatic term *catharsis*,<sup>66</sup> Aristotle clearly thought that the experience of such intense emotion in the audiences of Attic tragedy or Homeric epic was both pleasurable and somehow beneficial for the individual audience member. Gorgias agreed at least on the paradoxical pleasure to be had from the encounter with others’ suffering. Modern accounts of the pull exerted by fictional representations in a variety of media are beginning to emphasize their capacity-building qualities, their power to flex our imaginative muscles, to develop the cognitive capacities on which social interaction depends, and to extend and deepen our emotional repertoires. Such effects, notoriously, are not automatic; but they do at least seem to be possible.<sup>67</sup> The inclusion of *phrikē* in the emotional repertoire of ancient audiences does not in itself resolve any of the issues regarding the effects of emotional engagement with drama and narrative, but what it tells us about the character of that engagement itself suggests at least the possibility that emotional experiences of such immediacy and intensity played an important role in developing audiences’ capacity to feel for others, and so to understand themselves.

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<sup>66</sup> An unanswerable question, and so I do not pursue it here. For a recent (and inconclusive) review of the main avenues of interpretation, see Munteanu 2012, 238-50.

<sup>67</sup> For empirical evidence in support of the notion that fiction builds capacity in other-understanding and emotional intelligence, see Oatley 2011, 156-75; cf. Oatley 2012, esp. 121-6, 159-62, 184-8. For the general position, cf. Tooby and Cosmides 2001; J. Carroll 2006; Zunshine 2006; Boyd 2009, esp. 188-208; Dutton 2009, 109-26; Smith 2011, esp. 109-11.

## Biography

Douglas Cairns (PhD University of Glasgow, 1987) has held the Chair of Classics in the University of Edinburgh since 2004. He is the author of *Aidôs: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (OUP 1993), and of books and articles on Greek lyric poetry, tragedy, Homer, Greek society and ethics, and the emotions.

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