

QUANTUM IN BELLO FORTVNA POSSIT:  
A CONJECTURE TO *TRGF AD. F 665, 11\**

In the tragic trimeters of an unknown author transmitted by *PSI 1303* (= *TrGF Ad. F 665* Kannicht-Snell) Eteocles and Polynices debate before Jocasta, who has contrived an interview between them. The dialogue quickly degenerates into a violent quarrel that thwarts the mother's attempt to reconciliation.

The nature of this text, its date and above all its relation with the first episode of Euripides' *Phoenissae* are debated<sup>1</sup>. I shall delay

\* I would like to thank Luigi Battezzato for helpful comments on the subject discussed in this paper. I am also grateful to the two anonymous readers of the journal for their useful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> The fragment, written on the *verso* of a documentary papyrus found by Evaristo Breccia at Oxyrhynchus was first published by Medea Norsa and Girolamo Vitelli in 1935 ("Rifacimento di una scena delle *Fenicie* di Euripide", *Ann. R. Sc. Norm. Sup. Pisa*, Classe di Lettere, Storia e Filosofia, s. II, 4, 1935, 14-6) and later included in the collection of the *Papiri della Società Italiana* with the number 1303 (cf. *Papiri Greci e Latini*, vol. XIII, fasc. 1, a cura di M. Norsa, Firenze, 1949, 57-60). I have examined a photograph kept in the library of the Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli", Florence. The hand of the *recto* was dated to A.D. II by the first editors; that of the *verso* seemed to them "poco più recente". In the edition of *PSI 1303* Norsa assigned the latter to A.D. III (*Papiri Greci e Latini*, 57). Changes of speaker are marked by ἔκθεσις; there are no *sigla*, but the content of the dialogue allows to attribute many verses with certainty. Norsa and Vitelli, "Rifacimento di una scena delle *Fenicie*", 14-15 labelled the fragment as a late reworking of the first episode of Euripides' *Phoenissae* (446-637), a poor schoolroom exercise probably contemporary with the manuscript (see also Norsa, *Papiri Greci e Latini*, 60). They admitted however that the similarities with the *Phoenissae* are less strict than those normally found in texts of this kind (see for example the reworking of Verg. *Aen.* 1.477 ff. in *PSI 142*). Relevant differences may be detected indeed between the fragment and Euripides. Polynices hands his sword to Jocasta; she bids him swear that he will abide by her verdict; the two brothers speak to each other,

to another occasion a thorough discussion of this subject. Here I focus only on the problems of ll. 10-13<sup>2</sup>.

- <ET.> Ἐτεοκλέης {δι}δοὺς σκῆπτρα συγγόνω φ[έρει]ν  
 δειλὸς παρὰ βροτοῖς, εἰπέ μοι, νομίζεται;  
 <ΠΟ.> σὺ γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἐδίδους μὴ στρατοὺς ἄγοντί μοι[ι]  
 <ET.> τὸ μὴ θέλαιν σόν ἐστι, τὸ δὲ δοῦναι τύχης·  
 <ΠΟ.> ἔμοι προσάπτεις ὧν σὺ δρᾷς τὰς αἰτίας·  
 σὺ φέρειν γὰρ ἡμᾶς πολεμίου<ς> ἢ[ν]ἀγκασας·  
 εἰ γὰρ ἐμέρ[ι]ζες τὸ διάδημ' ἄτερ μάχης,  
 τίς ἦν {ἂν} ἀνάγκη τοῦ φέρειν στρατεύμ' ἐμέ;

*Quae non notantur suppl. Norsa et Vitelli* || 8-9 *interr.*  
*Page* || 8 -ΚΛΕΕC || 9 δειλός : ΔΙΝΟC || 11 ECTIN || *ante* 11  
*lacunam stat. Page, post* 11 *Garzya* || 15 ANAN *dittogr.?*

and Polynices addresses Eteocles by name. On these grounds D. L. Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, I, Cambridge Mass. 1942, 172-81 vindicated the creative effort of the author, and after a close examination of vocabulary and style came to the conclusion that what we read may be part of an original fourth-century tragedy. Page's opinion was shared by T. B. L. Webster, "Fourth Century Tragedy and the *Poetics*", *Hermes* 82, 1954, 297-8 (who proposed to identify the text as a fragment of Meletus' *Oidipodeia*, cf. *TrGF* 48 F 1), and is considered possible by G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, "A Survey of the Main Papyrus Texts of Post-Classical Tragedy", in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses*, Berlin 1995, *AP* B. 3, 1997, 1038-9. On the other side, A. Garzya, "Rifacimento di scena delle *Fenicie* di Euripide (*PSI* 1303)", *Aegyptus* 32, 1952 ("Scritti in onore di Girolamo Vitelli"), 389-98 (= *La parola e la scena. Studi sul teatro antico da Eschilo a Plauto*, Napoli 1997, 335-46) has argued in favour of the reworking. He thinks however that Euripides was imitated by the author on a larger scale than in Norsa's opinion, and attributes the fragment not to a schoolmaster but to a "cólto dilettante che ha voluto rifare le *Fenicie*". See also *TrGF* 2, *Fragmenta Adespota*, ed. R. Kannicht et B. Snell, Göttingen 1981, 252: "nos quidem versificatorem potius quam poetam audimus".

<sup>2</sup> I reproduce the text and apparatus of Kannicht and Snell, *TrGF* 2, 252. See also R. Kannicht *et al.*, *Musa Tragica. Die griechische Tragödie von Thespis bis Ezechiel*. Ausgewählte Zeugnisse und Fragmente griechisch und deutsch, Göttingen 1991, 264-7, where F 665 has been reprinted with a facing translation and a few new suggestions.

Page was the first to detect a difficulty in the passage : “I do not see how v. 11 can be interpreted to follow v. 10”. It is not easy indeed to explain how the words “you would not have offered it [*scil.* the sceptre], had I not brought armies hither” (10, Page’s translation) could be the cue for the answer “not to wish is in your power: granting your will, in Fortune’s” (11)<sup>3</sup>. Page suggested that something has been lost between 10 and 11, probably a question or a reproach by Eteocles that triggered Polynices’ answer at 12-13. Eteocles should have argued something like “you have brought an army to attack your own country”<sup>4</sup>.

Norsa rejected this proposal by emphasizing the connection between τὸ δὲ δοῦναι τύχης at 11 and οὐκ ἂν ἐδίδους at 10, that would be spoiled by the insertion of one or more lines between them (cf. also δοῦς σκῆπτρα at 8)<sup>5</sup>. She did not make any attempt, however, to solve the problem noticed by Page: the inconsistency of the passage, like other obscurities of the fragment, seemed to her a consequence of the mediocrity of the author.

A few years later Garzya, who accepted the argument of Norsa against Page’s lacuna, called attention to another difficulty of the passage: the unclear transition from 11 to 12-3. He observed that the words of Eteocles at 11 (“è in tuo potere il non volere, ma il concedere è della sorte”, in his translation) can hardly be interpreted as the appropriate antecedent for Polynices’ answer “a me attribuisi le cause di ciò che tu provochi”. According to Garzya, ll. 12-3 offer the response to a lost reproach by Eteocles, whose content should have been equivalent to Eur. *Ph.* 605 τίς

<sup>3</sup> The response of Eteocles at v. 11 would be understandable if τὸ μὴ θέλειν could be interpreted as “not to want that I retain the power”. This seems impossible, however, since an unexpressed object for θέλειν can be extracted only from the content of l. 10, where Polynices talks about διδόναι σκῆπτρα and στρατοῦς ἄγειν.

<sup>4</sup> Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, 176. In order to corroborate his suggestion, Page adds that the scribe “is evidently not copying the passage consecutively, but only certain portions of it”.

<sup>5</sup> Norsa, *Papiri Greci e Latini*, 60. She also reacted to the statement of Page quoted above (n. 4): “questa supposizione non sembra giustificata dai fatti [...] e soprattutto risulta inutile in base alla sostanziale mediocrità di tutto il brano”.

δ' ἂν κλύοι σου πατρίδ' ἐπεστρατευμένου; and 609 ἄλλ' οὐ πατρίδος ὡς σὺ πολέμιος. In other words, we are led again to the hypothesis of a lacuna, to be placed after l. 11 instead than before it<sup>6</sup>. This solution is based on Garzya's main thesis, *i.e.* that the fragment is part of a large-scale reworking of Euripides' *Phoenissae* (see above, n. 1). This is far from certain, however, and even if a direct connection of the fragment with Euripides could be demonstrated, the suggestion that the content of the lacuna was similar to *Ph.* 605 and 609 would still be questionable.

I would not follow then either Page or Garzya in marking a lacuna before or after l. 11<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, I am persuaded that they were right in asserting that something is wrong in the sequence 10-3. In my view, the problem lies with the content of l. 11, which in the transmitted form seems inappropriate to the context. Why should Eteocles underline the obvious fact that it is in his brother's power "not to wish" (τὸ μὴ θέλειν), *i.e.* to give up his decision to fight<sup>8</sup>? Moreover, it is not easy to understand in what sense τὸ μὴ θέλειν can be opposed to τὸ δὲ δοῦναι, the latter being described as Fortune's prerogative. The structure of the sentence makes likely that θέλειν and δοῦναι have the same unexpressed object (*i.e.* "to obtain the power by fighting")<sup>9</sup>: but if Polynices decided "not to wish" to fight for the reign, he would have no need of Fortune's assistance to see his wish fulfilled.

What one would expect here from Eteocles, as a response to his brother's mention of the necessity of an armed expedition, is a reference to the uncertainty of the outcome of war, which very rarely corresponds to human expectations. It may be

<sup>6</sup> Garzya, "Rifacimento di scena delle *Fenicie*", 391-2, 397-8 (= *La parola e la scena*, 338, 345).

<sup>7</sup> Kannicht and Snell, *TrGF* 2, 252 print 10-13 as they stand in the papyrus, noting in the apparatus "ante 11 lac. statuit Page, post 11 Garzya".

<sup>8</sup> See the translation of Kannicht *et al.*, *Musa Tragica*, 265: "Verzichten steht in deiner Macht, in der des Schicksals, zu gewähren".

<sup>9</sup> It would be very harsh to understand two different objects in order to translate "you have only the power not to wish (to fight for the reign): the power to give you back (the reign) is in the hands of Fortune". Even if one could put up with this, anyway, the response of Polynices at 12 would remain difficult to explain.

noted (though the coincidence is probably only incidental) that the same argument occurs in the last peroration that Seneca's Jocasta addresses to Polynices (Sen. *Ph.* 625-9): *nunc belli mala | propone, dubias Martis incerti vices. | licet omne tecum Graeciae robur trahas, | licet arma longe miles ac late explicet, | fortuna belli semper ancipiti in loco est.* A very slight correction gives us the expected sentence, by restoring a natural couple μέν / δέ:

τὸ μὲν θέλειν σὸν ἐστὶ, τὸ δὲ δοῦναι τύχῃς  
 “to wish is in your power: granting your will, in  
 Fortune’s”<sup>10</sup>.

Polynices can only θέλειν to obtain the power over Thebes by fighting: τὸ δοῦναι (*i.e.* to grant that his wish will come true) is a different matter, that ultimately depends on τύχη<sup>11</sup>.

The main advantage of this emendation is that it restores a smooth transition both from 10 to 11 and from 11 to 12-3, thus making any hypothesis of lacuna unnecessary. By saying at 10 σὺ γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἐδίδους μὴ στρατοὺς ἄγοντί μοι, Polynices implies that the threat of the impending battle should persuade Eteocles to surrender, unless he wants to see Thebes destroyed. Eteocles reacts at 11 by reminding his brother *quantum in bello fortuna possit*, as Caesar put it<sup>12</sup>: Polynices should not be over-confident in planning what only Fortune can decide.

<sup>10</sup> The cause of the corruption may have been the confusion between N and H, and the subsequent fall of E (MEN > MEH > MH), or perhaps the presence of another μή at l. 10.

<sup>11</sup> For the dependence of the outcome of war on τύχη see for example Thuc. I 78 τοῦ δὲ πολέμου τὸν παράλογον, ὅσος ἐστὶ, πρὶν ἐν αὐτῷ γενέσθαι προδιάγνωτε: μηκυνόμενος γὰρ φιλεῖ ἐς τύχας τὰ πολλὰ περιστασθαι, ὧν ἴσον τε ἀπέχομεν καὶ ὁποτέρως ἔσται ἐν ἀδήλῳ κινδυνεύεται and Isoc. *Archid.* 92 εἰσὶν δ' αἱ τῶν πόλεων κακίαι καταφανεῖς οὐχ ἥττον ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις βουλευμάσιν ἢ τοῖς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ κινδύνοις. Τῶν μὲν γὰρ ἐκεῖ γιγνομένων τὸ πλεῖστον μέρος τῆ τύχῃ μέτεστιν. The same idea is widespread in Latin authors: see the note to Sen. *Ph.* 625-9 in M. Frank, *Seneca's Phoenissae*, Leiden - New York - Köln 1995, 245.

<sup>12</sup> Caes. *Bell. Gall.* VI 35.2: *hic quantum in bello fortuna possit et quantos adferat casus cognosci potuit.*

As for the connection between 11 and 12-3, it becomes fully understandable now that at 11 Eteocles ascribes to his brother the will (τὸ θέλειν) to put an end to the quarrel by the use of force. This is the same as accusing him of being responsible for the war. Hence the strong reaction of Polynices, who turns the accusation back upon his opponent: “the blame you fasten on me, but the deeds are yours! It was you that compelled me to bring enemies”.

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