SOPHOCLES, SEDUCTION AND SHRIVELLING: ICHNEUTAI FR. 316
RADT*

SOPHOCLES fr. 316 comprises matching entries in Photius Lex. p.489 Porson and Suda ρ166, which are thought to derive from Pausanias the Atticist’s dictionary.¹ Erbse presents the following text (ρ5):²

ικνοόθεαι: τὸ διέλκεσθαι καὶ παντοδαπῶς διαστρέψεσθαι κατ’
εἴδος, λέγεται δὲ καὶ τὸ καμπύλον γίγνεσθαι ἀσχημόνως καὶ κατὰ
συνούσιαν καὶ δρέχοντας, κάμπτοντα τὴν ὀσφον. Σοφοκλῆς Ιχνευταῖς,
´ρικνοόθεαι´: being twisted and variously skewed in appearance; it is
also used for lewdly making oneself curved, during sex or dancing,
by curling the lower spine (Sophocles in the Ichneutai).

How the verb fitted in to the Ichneutai has gone unanswered. Radt ad loc.
merely comments ‘vix ad F 314.302 referendum’.³ I agree: the lexicographers
cannot be trying to gloss that description, also from Ichneutai, of the tortoise from
which Hermes has fashioned a lyre:

βραχός, χυτροίδης, ποικίλη δοράι καταρρικνωμένος.
It is short, pot-shaped, and shrivelled up with a spotted skin.

Nevertheless, when the tragedians use a rare stem twice in the same play, the
recurrence often forms an intratext to which one can attach some interpretative
weight. Can one conjecture a significance-bearing reason why Sophocles might
have used the extremely rare ρικνόομαι and καταρρικνόμαι in very different senses
within the same play?⁴

I believe we can. The key is the remarkable ‘coincidence’ that the Homeric
Hymn to Hermes – a text with much the same plot as Ichneutai and widely regarded
as a source for Sophocles – also employs a phrase for ‘to sway the lower spine
sexily’.⁵

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interesting me in the uses of ρικνός.
¹ Pausanias’ entry had earlier been paraphrased by Moeris ρ2 (ρικνοόθεαι: τὸ ἀσχημόνος
κυνέσθαι. Αττικοί) and abbreviated by Hesychius ρ319. A similar sense is attributed by
Pausanias (δ13) to διαρρικνοόθεαι: τὸ τὴν ὀσφον φορτικὸς περιάγειν. Κρατίνος
Τροφονίοι (= PCG fr. 234). Both Cratinus’s fragment and the similar phrasing at Pollux
4.99 refer to dance. The only other non-lexicographical use of infinitive ρικνοόθεαι is
Oppian Hal. 5.593, of the apparent shrivelling-up of marine molluscs with the waning
moon.
² H. Erbse, Untersuchungen zu den Attizistischen Lexika (Berlin, 1950), 206.
³ Similarly e.g. A.C. Pearson, The Fragments of Sophocles (Cambridge, 1917), 1.269; E.V.
Maltese, Sofocle: Ichneutai (Florence, 1982), 65.
⁴ Taking Gregory of Nyssa, who uses both verbs, as a cut-off, and excluding
lexicographers, TLG finds seven uses of ρικνόομαι and only Sophocles’ use of
καταρρικνόμαι.
⁵ The relationship of H.Herm. and Ichn. is argued for by L. Koettgen, Quae ratio
intercedat inter Indagatores fabulam Sophocleam et Hymnum in Mercurium qui fert
Homericus (Bonn 1914); Pearson (n.3), 1.225-8; J.A. Fernández Delgado, ‘La lucha entre
Hermes y Apolo del Epos al teatro: el Himno a Hermes como hipotexto de los Sabuesos
de Sófocles’, in J.V. Bañuls, F. de Martino and C. Morenilla (edd.), El teatro clásico en el
As Hermes first leaves his cave the narrator, giving Hermes’ focalisation, describes a tortoise σαῦλα ποσὶν βαίνουσα (28). Aristophanes’ use of σαυλοπρωκτιά (Vesp. 1171-3) and διασαυλόμαι (PCG fr. 635) shows what motion is intended – swaying the bottom from side to side, as tortoises indeed do as they walk. This swaying can imply vanity (as in e.g. Semonides IEG² fr. 18 and the Aristophanes passages), but also sensuality. The satyrs, according to Euripides Cyclops 39-40, once approached Althaea’s house drunk, σαυλομενι, and prepared to serenade her with a barbitos. Anacreon used the word similarly, according to Clement of Alexandria (Paed. 3.11.69):

αἱ δὲ γυναικεῖοι κινήσεις καὶ θρύσεις καὶ χλιδαὶ κολουστέαι παντελῶς· τὸ γὰρ ἁβροδίατον τῆς περὶ τὸν περίπατον κινήσεως καὶ τὸ ‘σαῦλα βαίνειν’, ὡς φησὶν Ἀνακρέων [PMG fr. 113], κομιδὴ ἐταιρικά, ὡς γέ μοι φαίνεται.
‘Feminine movements and airs and luxuries must be completely curtailed: for pampered practices in one’s gait and ‘σαῦλα βαίνειν’, in Anacreon’s words, are utterly meretricious, in my humble opinion.’

That σαῦλα connotes sensuality in the Hymn to Hermes is confirmed just a few lines later, with Hermes’ remarkable greeting (31):

χαῖρε φυήν ἔρόσσεσα, χοροϊτύπε, δαιτὸς ἐταιρή.⁶
Be kindly, you gorgeous-bodied girl, who stamps in the chorus, who is a companion of the feast.

The Hymn to Hermes poses us a puzzle: how can Hermes see a sexy strut in the lumbering gait of a tortoise? This is not the place to discuss how that puzzle is gradually resolved.⁷ For our purposes, it is enough that the hymnist took an apparently unalluring specimen, and re-described its walk in such terms.

Putting the lexicographers’ entries together with σαῦλα βαίνειν in the Hymn to Hermes produces a plausible account of fr. 316 and its relationship to Ichn. 302. ῥικνοῦθαι could describe the ‘sexy dance’ of the tortoise – or, perhaps, of the satyrs imitating a tortoise as they come to terms with its delightful music in the latter portion of the play.⁸ But the verb would also recall the preceding, accurate description of the tortoise as κατερρικνωμένος ‘shrivelled’. This leaves us with an interesting new case of how satyr-plays pick up on and rework themes from epic, visible most obviously in Euripides’ use of Odyssey 9 in his Cyclops.⁹ I submit that

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⁶ Sophocles’ only use of φυή, in the discussion of the tortoise’s form at Ichn. 307, may owe something to this very line.
⁸ In 93-128 they imitate hunting-dogs. Possibly at 118-22, while describing the impossible prints of the cows, they try to clarify their report by enacting what the infer to have been the cows’ stance. In any case, Silenus is astonished by their all-fours posture at 124.
Sophocles not only took over the *Hymn to Hermes*’ paradoxically sexy tortoise, but gave her a further ‘twist in the tail’, by encapsulating both sexiness and unsexiness intratextually into a single verb.

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