TOPICS IN SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES*

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SOPHOCLES' *Philoctetes* is deservedly a much-studied play, and only sparse gleanings seem likely to remain for those who seek to propose total novelties in interpreting it.[2] Much of the time, in these notes, I am attempting to restate or remarshal arguments for well-known positions; even the arguments are often old; I can only hope the redeployment of some of them will occasionally seem to sharpen them. It will be obvious how much I am indebted to the editions by Campbell and Jebb, and to recent interpretative studies by Linforth, Kitto, and Knox.[3] Some old arguments I have probably recapitulated far too briefly, others I have perhaps reiterated at tedious length. My excuse for writing at all must perhaps be that the excellences of this play seem to be peculiarly in need of defence against critics who approach Greek tragedies with a conventional stereotype in mind, especially those who incline to think that Greek drama must in various ways have been undramatic.

I. SCENERY AND STAGE PRESENTATION

At several points in the *Philoctetes* any attempt to settle questions of linguistic interpretation requires us to try to envisage the stage presentation of the play. This is particularly important at 201–20, where three questions are in danger of interlocking. Where did Philoctetes make his entrance? Did the actor try to represent Philoctetes' lameness? And how was his cave represented, if at all, on the *skene*? On some solutions these are separate questions, on others they are interrelated. W. J. Woodhouse[4] produced a solution linking all three questions; Miss A. M. Dale[5] did not consider the second question, but suggested the same solution as Woodhouse's to provide an interlocking answer to the other two. Philoctetes, they believed, entered from his cave. But since at 31 sq. and 161 sq. we are told that Philoctetes is not in his cave, for Philoctetes later to make his entrance from his cave he must have been able to return to it by an offstage route. But we are told several times that the cave had two mouths; so we have only to assume that one mouth was on stage and one off stage.

[1] I am extremely grateful for the criticisms and encouragement offered to me at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington by Bernard Knox and Nicolaos Hourmouziades. I have also signalled below some debts to Edinburgh colleagues and to the editors of *C.Q.*

[2] Though one could point to two recent palmary emendations: ἄλωσιν οὐκέτ' ἴσχω by Jackson at 1094 (*Marginalia Scaenica*, Oxford, 1955, p. 114), and ἃ ἃ ἃ ἃ by Philp at 782 (*C.R.* viii (1958), 220).

[3] I. M. Linforth, *Philoctetes: the Play and the Man* (= *Un. Cal. Pub. Class. Phil.* xv. 3), Berkeley, 1956. H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, London, 1956, chap. iv, B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper*, Berkeley, 1964, chap. v.

[4] *J.H.S.* xxxii (1912), pp. 239–49.

[5] *Wiener Studien* lxix (1956), pp. 104–6.

Woodhouse wanted Philoctetes to enter from his cave to avoid the difficulty of having a lame figure make a long entrance from the *parodos*. Miss Dale said nothing about Philoctetes' lameness, but wanted him at his first appearance to dominate the stage 'aloft centre, against his proper background of the rugged cave'.

Woodhouse used the difficulty of Philoctetes' lameness as an argument, but failed to face the problem directly. Philoctetes cannot make his *exit* through his cave, and must make several attempts at movement at later points in the play (notably to get to the rock from which he intends to throw himself at 1000, and to get into a position to shoot at Odysseus at 1299–1301). We must consider how the actor must have dealt with Philoctetes' lameness as a separate question before we return to the problem of his entrance.

Guesses about dramatic conventions are necessarily tricky. Hardly any degree of non-realistic convention is impossible if the audience is accustomed to accept it.[1] On the other hand a skilful dramatist will probably avoid overstraining a convention; where there is a conventional limit on the action that can be played on the stage, he will perhaps avoid implying action far beyond that limit too often. The most striking stage action in the *Philoctetes*, of course, is that Philoctetes collapses at 821 and sleeps on the ground till 894. Would Sophocles have included this scene if convention had prevented an actor from representing this on the stage? On the other hand even a modern actor might find restraint more convincing than total realism in portraying Philoctetes' agonies in the previous scene; some conventional gesture to mark the onset of each new spasm (at 732, 739, 754, 782) might suffice. But no gestures at all in that scene would surely strain convention. So, it seems to me, would the absence in the play as a whole of any attempt to represent Philoctetes' lameness. We must postulate (1) dramatic conventions allowing at least some possibility of suggesting pain and lameness, (2) an actor playing Philoctetes whom Sophocles could trust with the task of bringing off the lameness and the agonies within those conventions.[2] Lessing in *Laocoon* was no doubt too easily assuming a totally realistic style of acting in the *Philoctetes*, but at least he did not underrate the importance of Philoctetes' suffering as an element in the play.

It is fifty years since Woodhouse wrote, and all may by now have been converted, but there is external evidence to be added. Euripides brought in his Philoctetes limping in 431 B.C.; Odysseus observed as Philoctetes entered (in Dio Chrysostom's paraphrase, *Or.* 59. 5), *αὐτὸς ὅδε . . . οὐκ ἄδηλος τῇ ξυμφορᾷ, μόλις καὶ χαλεπῶς προβαίνων*. If a playwright wanted to introduce a traditionally lame character *without* allowing the actor to limp, he would hardly refer to the lameness just as the actor made his first entrance walking normally. Moreover Aristophanes' jokes at *Acharnians* 411 sq. (426 B.C.) are unmistakably aimed at realism in production; it is absurd to explain them away as solely concerned with the low social status of Euripides' characters. Lameness is not always a mark of low degree. Of course in 431 Euripides may not have yet been entirely successful in changing dramatic conventions; but the appearances seem to be that by 409 Sophocles willingly or unwillingly had fallen in with the new convention and wrote the *Philoctetes* with its use in mind.

If the rest of the play requires a skilful actor employing some degree of

[1] On this kind of problem see K. J. Dover, 'The Skene in Aristophanes', *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* N.S. xii (1966), 2–17.

[2] Linforth's paragraph on this is excellent (p. 125).

realism, there is no reason why Philoctetes' first entrance should not be contrived to make use of the actor's full powers. Indeed the actor must be if anything more careful to suggest his lameness successfully at his first entrance than later. In that case he should be given the 'build-up' necessary to help him bring off his awkward first moment. I am inclined to think Sophocles helps him rather than hides him. Philoctetes is given plenty of time to make a long, slow entry by the *parodos*, with the audience's attention focused and thoughts guided by the words of the chorus.

To return now to Woodhouse's suggestion about the scenery. The strongest argument against it is its artificiality. The purpose and result of the action of the first scene as far as l. 49 is to establish two facts: (1) that this is Philoctetes' cave; (2) that he is not at present in his cave (or Odysseus would be unable to risk spending any time on stage to explain his plans to Neoptolemus). If Philoctetes later emerged from his cave, that might confirm the first fact, if that were necessary, but it would greatly surprise the audience who have twice been told the second fact. However it was contrived, it would reek of artifice. Moreover, although a dramatist might wish to avoid dwelling on an artificiality, if such a device was employed the audience would be entitled to a little more explanation than Sophocles gives us in the play as it stands. It could easily have been given. There is admitted to be a danger that Philoctetes will return; at 45 a scout is sent to give warning. If the scout was intended to cover the off-stage mouth of the cave, this should, and easily could, have been explained. Again, at 144 sq. the sailors are instructed to inspect the cave, but warned to be alert in case Philoctetes returns; if there was a danger that Philoctetes might actually appear from his cave, they should, and easily could, have been warned of that, which *pace* Miss Dale they are not. (See below on 146–7.) If Sophocles had made Odysseus and Neoptolemus utter explicit warnings that Philoctetes, though apparently away, nevertheless could return via the off-stage mouth of his cave, the audience would quickly have gathered what Philoctetes' future movements might be. Since Odysseus and Neoptolemus already have to utter warnings about Philoctetes' possible return as it is, Sophocles would have had a relatively simple opportunity to elucidate, but not to stress, his rather artificial stage-management; but without this much elucidation the audience would be in total confusion. Woodhouse argued that the audience, on seeing one mouth of a cave, and being told it had two mouths, would easily infer that the other mouth was off stage. They could hardly do otherwise, if conscious of the problem; but they would probably also assume that if they were not to be shown the other mouth, it must be irrelevant; they were not going to *need* to see it. They were not likely to start making elaborate guesses about its possible use unless specifically prompted; and although after Philoctetes had made a surprise entry they might be able to work out how it had happened, that would be too late; considerable immediate confusion would already have been created.

Woodhouse and Miss Dale are thus probably wrong to require one mouth only of the cave to be on stage. If two mouths were on stage, what did the scene-painting amount to? Perhaps it was, with more or less elaboration, a screen painted with rocks standing parallel to the back of the stage, behind either end of which an actor could disappear. The mouths themselves could be represented with some degree of realism if desired, and still be deemed to face different ways because at opposite sides of the stage.

Why did Sophocles invent a two-mouthed cave for Philoctetes if he did not want to perform Woodhouse's dramatic trick with it? It had to be a distinctive cave that could be reidentified, and also one in which Philoctetes can have survived for a long time without being driven to move house. That a two-mouthed cave, as caves go, had some amenities, was no doubt true, and served dramatically as a characteristically self-excusing detail for Odysseus to mention (16–20). Remember too that Philoctetes has to be given lines that suggest that the picture of his long home is stamped in his heart; *ὦ σχῆμα πέτρας δίπυλον* at 952 stands at a place where vividness is essential. Finally, if Sophocles indeed invented scene-painting,[1] why should he not use it as fully as his total purposes might suggest?

These amount, I think, to adequate arguments for the general proposition that the text of the *Philoctetes* as we have it suggests that in the production Sophocles intended to employ, and to enrich the play by employing, certain degrees of realism both in the acting and in the scenery. I move to particular passages; I stress that these points of detail, in my view, support, rather than depend on, the more general arguments.

29 *and* 162–3

In 29 the manuscripts require us to choose[2] between *στίβου γ' οὐδεὶς κτύπος*, 'no sound of footfall' (from within the cave), and *στίβου γ' οὐδεὶς τύπος*, 'no print of footstep' (outside the cave). Campbell and Jebb both argued for *κτύπος*, asserting that 30, 'Beware he is not encamped asleep', was a reply to a remark about matters inside the cave. But 30 could be motivated merely by Odysseus' seeing Neoptolemus about to go into the cave. In fact 162–3 provide a stronger confirmation of *κτύπος*. There Neoptolemus says *Δῆλον ἔμοιγ' ὡς φορβῆς χρείᾳ στίβον ὀγμεύει τόνδε πέλας που*, where *δῆλον ἔμοιγε* prepares for what Campbell rightly saw[3] was a deictic use of *τόνδε*. Neoptolemus has now seen, and points to, a furrow-like track left by Philoctetes' dragging foot, and says 'it is evident to me that he is searching for food, ploughing this furrow as he goes, somewhere close by'. Neoptolemus can therefore hardly have earlier asserted the absence of footprints. Sophocles reserves the discovery of them till now in order to add fresh interest for the audience on the second occasion when Philoctetes' cave is inspected, and also to provide an extra cue for the ensuing ode of sympathy for Philoctetes when his pitiable footprint reveals how bad his wound is. 173–5 refer back to this discovery.

38 *ἰοὺ ἰού· καὶ ταῦτά γ' ἄλλα θάλπεται*
ῥάκη

καὶ ταῦτά γ' ἄλλα of course means 'here is something else, rags drying in the sun' (not 'these are more rags'; no previous rags have been found). Woodhouse rightly pointed out that if these rags were at the sunward mouth of the cave, Neoptolemus must first have entered the cave by its shadowed mouth, or he would have found the rags earlier. This involved Woodhouse in believing that Neoptolemus called *ἰοὺ ἰού* from off stage. That alone is a hint that Woodhouse's view of the scenery is incorrect.[4] But if there were two mouths on stage,

[1] Ar. *Poet.* 1449[a]18.

[2] Even if A represents a Byzantine recension, it cannot therefore be ignored; contamination begins to seem almost universal in Greek MSS. I shall argue for A's reading at 220.

[3] *Paralipomena Sophoclea*, London, 1907, p. 199.

[4] As Linforth noted (p. 97 n. 2).

then perhaps the actor playing Neoptolemus actually passed through the cave from one mouth to the other (between 36 and 38) and found the rags on emerging at its further end. This device would help to confirm the audience's impression that the cave had been searched fully enough to show that (1) this is undoubtedly Philoctetes' home even though (2) he is not himself now present.

If for the actor to pass through the cave was in any danger of smacking of pantomime, of course Neoptolemus can have moved from one mouth to the other outside the cave. But Miss Dale's conjecture that the cave in Euripides' *Cyclops* was perhaps meant to parody the *Philoctetes* may be suggestive here; perhaps what happened in that play at the end was that the blinded Cyclops felt his way into his *ἀμφιτρὴς ἥδε*, 707, and to the great amusement of the audience emerged on the stage again at once by its other mouth. That could be pantomime and also parody without implying that its original had been pantomime.[1]

But whether the actor actually passed through the cave is relatively unimportant; it is more important to see that the late discovery of the rags suggests that the second mouth was on stage.

146–7 *δέρκου θαρσῶν· ὁπόταν δὲ μόλῃ*
δεινὸς ὁδίτης, τῶνδ' ἐκ μελάθρων . . .

The scholiast here paraphrases *νῦν μέν, φησίν, εἰσελθὼν ὅρα τὸν τόπον, ἐπὰν δὲ ἔλθῃ, τότε σὺ τῶν μελάθρων ἀποστὰς ὑπηρέτει μοι πρὸς τὴν παροῦσαν χρείαν.* This has been misreported[2] and disbelieved, but is most probably perfectly correct. Unmistakably Neoptolemus is inviting the chorus, or at least the coryphaeus, to inspect the cave from somewhere closer than the *orchestra*. The reply at 161 implies that the speaker can see right through the cave and see that Philoctetes is absent. For the whole chorus to approach the cave would certainly sink to pantomime; and where would they perform the antistrophe? But the coryphaeus could no doubt have made some movements as of inspection. What one must not mistake is Neoptolemus' invitation, for this elucidates the apparently awkward *τῶνδ' ἐκ μελάθρων*. As I have argued above, the audience at this moment know that Philoctetes is not in his cave, and must presume in the absence of further explanation that he cannot be going to come out of it. So to link *τῶνδ' ἐκ μελάθρων* with *ὁπόταν δὲ μόλῃ δεινὸς ὁδίτης* would be to give the audience a considerable shock and leave them at least temporarily in confusion, even if with only one mouth of the cave on stage they could eventually perform the deductions required of them by Woodhouse. The reason why Sophocles could write *τῶνδ' ἐκ μελάθρων* so close to the 'wrong' verb *μόλῃ*, apart from the fact that he as producer could instruct the chorus about the delivery of the line, is precisely that the audience are in very little danger of taking it the wrong way. Someone is being invited to go into the cave; Philoctetes is not known to be likely to come out of it, but he may appear from elsewhere; if he does appear from elsewhere, it is clear enough who else must come out of his cave. Jebb is confused when he says 'The chorus never enter the cave'; what matters is that Neoptolemus *invites* them (or their

[1] This would still be part of the Cyclops' final exit of the play, but a little delay would help to make it quite clear that he was not going to succeed in smashing Odysseus' ship with rocks. This whole suggestion of course assumes, with Miss Dale, that the *Cyclops* could be dated to 408 B.C.

[2] In Pearson's apparatus.

leader) to enter it. As to syntax, perhaps Neoptolemus would have said in full ἐκ μελάθρων ἐκστάς if he had not been going to add another participle of motion with πρὸς χεῖρα προχωρῶν. But in any case the total instructions given by Neoptolemus are not, as Jebb alleges they would be on this reading, for a *gradual* retreat from the cave, so much as for a retreat and subsequent position-taking at all times under Neoptolemus' control. (Both Pearson and Dain rejected Jebb's arguments here, but I rebut these because they were revived by Miss Dale.)

201–23

At 201 προὐφάνη κτύπος; the sailors catch the sound of Philoctetes moaning and groaning as he moves. The audience need not hear anything; even Neoptolemus does not catch the sound as soon as the sailors do; and convention could, and probably sometimes had to, allow characters on stage to report noises unheard by the audience. The sailors cannot yet tell the direction of the noise; they point ἤ που τῇδ' ἢ τῇδε τόπων, presumably, that is, in two different directions, perhaps even towards the two opposite *parodoi*; the remark is clearly designed to arouse the audience to watch for a new character's entrance.

At 210 something new occurs: ἔχε φροντίδας νέας. This must be the moment at which the sailors first *see* Philoctetes. I suspect it is also the moment at which the audience first see him. They can hardly be kept waiting longer; their attention has been aroused, they have been told what to expect to see—a man moving with great difficulty; and they are going to hear more comments by the sailors on, I suggest, what can now be seen of Philoctetes, no longer merely heard.

In 211 Miss Dale and Woodhouse wanted ἔντοπος to mean 'in his cave'. That would no doubt be possible if the context made it plain, but the word itself need not be so precise; at *O.C.* 1457 and *Phil.* 1171 it merely means 'at hand', within range of, in the same area as, the speaker. The preceding οὐκ ἔξεδρος makes the remark more emphatic, but again not necessarily more precise; 'not away from his home' of Philoctetes need not mean that he is actually *in* his cave. If Sophocles was trying to warn the audience not to be surprised by an appearance of Philoctetes from his cave, he could and should have been much more specific.

At 213–14

οὐ μολπὰν σύριγγος ἔχων,
ὡς ποιμὴν ἀγροβάτας,

has been a puzzle. We know that Philoctetes has been groaning (205–9); we are about to be told that he βοᾷ τηλωπὸν ἰωάν. It can hardly be the case that his groans have suggested the piping of a shepherd; it is true that 'he is not piping like a shepherd' emphasizes the nature of his utterances by contrast;[1] but why *this* contrast? Jebb thought it was merely Philoctetes' 'return from wild places' that suggested a shepherd. I suggest that if Philoctetes was by now visible, it was his dress that was shepherd-like. Euripides' Philoctetes was dressed in skins, as Odysseus observed; ἥ τε στολὴ ἀήθης· δοραὶ θηρίων

[1] Dr. E. K. Borthwick reminded me of Jebb's note on ἄλυρος, κτλ. Professor Dover suggests that even long before Theocritus a shepherd's life and music may have been proverbially idyllic and cheerful.

καλύπτουσιν αὐτόν, Dio Chrys. 59. 5. Anyone dressed in skins was liable to be taken for a countryman, a shepherd, or a goatherd; cf. *Odyssey* 13. 221–4,

> Ἀθήνη, | ἀνδρὶ δέμας ἐϊκυῖα . . . ἐπιβώτορι μήλων . . .
> δίπτυχον ἀμφ' ὤμοισιν ἔχουσ' εὐεργέα λώπην

(λωπία = δέρμα, *Etym. Mag.*), *Od.* 14. 530, Eur. *Cyclops* 80, Menander *Epitr.* 152 (διφθέρα = ποιμενικὸν περιβόλαιον ἐκ δερμάτων, *Suda*), Theocr. 7. 13–16.

In 215 ἀλλ' ἤ που πταίων is perhaps meant to draw the audience's attention to the actor's pretence of limping. Euripides' Odysseus referred directly to Philoctetes' dress and lameness; Sophocles makes his sailors allude to these sufficiently clearly for the audience not to miss the point.

In 216 βοᾷ τηλωπὸν ἰωάν means 'he cries ἰώ to us, seeing us from afar'. ἰωάν, as Campbell saw, refers precisely to Philoctetes' ἰὼ ξένοι at 219. (No doubt the audience did not hear Philoctetes' hail until the sailors ceased to speak; here this convention would be necessary.) Jebb was wrong to translate ἰωάν as 'moan'; Philoctetes is not merely still groaning as he was at 201–9. ἰωά simply means 'a cry of ἰώ', and this ἰώ is a hail, not a moan. τηλωπός here is better taken as active, 'seeing from afar'; Philoctetes' hails prove to the sailors that he has seen them. For active uses of the -ωπός termination cf. ὀξυωπός, ἀμβλυωπός, the latter attested for Euripides, fr. 1096 N², both normal Attic in Aristotle (see Bonitz's index).

The sailors guess that Philoctetes hails them either because he is stumbling and wants help, or because he has seen their ship; which it turns out that he has. ναὸς ἄξενον αὐγάζων ὅρμον (217–18) is rendered by Jebb 'as he gazes on the haven that hath no ship for guest', by Campbell (as earlier by Hermann) 'eyeing the inhospitable moorage of our ship'. The words could perhaps mean either; the context proves Campbell right. Philoctetes observes almost at once, at 221, that Lemnos is οὐκ εὔορμος; that does not merely mean 'Lemnos has a bad harbour', since at 302 Philoctetes says οὐ γάρ τις ὅρμος ἔστιν. Philoctetes is not looking at an empty harbour; there was no such thing; he can see a ship beached in a dangerous place.

In 218 προβοᾷ is all but a *hapax legomenon*, but προ- may well imply 'he cries *to us*', reiterating the sailors' identification of Philoctetes' 'hail from afar'. Philoctetes is pathetically anxious not to let a chance of rescue escape him.

At 220 Philoctetes refers at once to the ship he has seen. ναυτίλῳ πλάτῃ in A is right; if it is not direct tradition, it is judicious contamination or successful conjecture. Jebb could not read it because of his false interpretation of ὅρμον just above; he adopted κἀκ ποίας πάτρας in 220 and put an obelus at its repetition in 222. W. T. Vesey defended the repetition of ποίας πάτρας for dramatic effect;[1] certainly 225–6 and 230 suggest that Philoctetes had difficulty in getting an answer. But there is perhaps less need to make that point three times instead of twice, than to make it clear immediately that Philoctetes knows that these men could rescue him. Nothing can be further from his mind than the old Ithacan joke that one can only reach islands by sea; he has seen the ship these men came on, and knows that it has not yet left; he knows he must catch their attention while it is still there; he has been tricked before by ships that sailed too soon.

(The ship of course is not on stage, but is presumed to lie a little distance off in the direction from which Odysseus and Neoptolemus first entered;

[1] *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.*, 1927, p. 34.

Philoctetes presumably returns from the other direction, seeing before him both the sailors and their ship, the sailors closer to him.)

To sum up: both the sailors and the audience are given ample time to take in Philoctetes' fearsome and pitiful appearance, his lameness and his skins, all that makes him *ἀπηγριωμένον* (226). His groans are described by the sailors at 201–9; they alert us for his entry at 210; from 210–19 he is visible to the audience stumbling towards the sailors, shouting and perhaps gesturing towards their ship. This entry need only be 'ruinous' (Miss Dale) if badly acted. If well acted it will be a key point in the play. Sophocles' text shows that he took the risk. There is no need to assume that fifth-century tragedies were written for bad actors.

One thing the audience saw when Philoctetes entered is not alluded to; the bow. Philoctetes gestures to it at 288, but Neoptolemus does not dare to mention it until Philoctetes has again spoken of it at 652–3. The bow is so simple and vital a symbol that it needs little emphasis. Later in the play the audience will spend much time watching to see who has it at any given moment. Odysseus never gets it; a key point about the surprise re-entry at 1222 is that the audience see at once that Neoptolemus still has the bow. Sophocles at 210 makes sure of the effect of the lameness and the skins; the bow will not be unnoticed, but its full effect can wait till later.

814–18

Philoctetes is here delirious, and exactly what he is trying to do is not clear. In 817 his *ἀπό μ' ὀλεῖς, ἢν προσθίγῃς* is explicitly a protest that Neoptolemus is hurting him by touching him. But *μέθες μέθες με* in 816 should perhaps not be taken to be a similar protest; it seems rather stronger, and Neoptolemus' *ποῖ μεθῶ;* probably means 'where will you go if I release you?' Jebb's suggestion here seems to have been ignored, but may have been right. Philoctetes wants to get to the cliff from which he could throw himself down, as he threatens to do again at 1000–1. He refers very vaguely to the cliff in 814 as *ἐκεῖσε* and *ἄνω* in the hope that Neoptolemus will unsuspectingly help him up; but in 815 Neoptolemus guesses his plan—*τί παραφρονεῖς αὖ;*—and seizes him. During 816 and 817 they struggle, and *ἀπό μ' ὀλεῖς, ἢν προσθίγῃς* represents Philoctetes' final ruse to get loose; but Neoptolemus releases him only when he ceases to struggle—*εἴ τι δὴ πλέον φρονεῖς*, 818. The cryptic *τί τὸν ἄνω λεύσσεις κύκλον;* perhaps reflects the moment when Philoctetes takes his eyes off the cliff too late to prevent Neoptolemus from guessing his intention. Philoctetes' moments of frenzy and clarity and spasms of less and more acute pain necessitate great skill on the actor's part in this scene, not least in tempo, as Lessing realized (*Laocoon*, ch. 1).

This is Jebb's suggestion elaborated in order to recommend it. But one must question how much the audience would understand of all this. That Philoctetes is intent on suicide is known from 797–803. But his present intention will only be plain if the rock is clearly visible on the stage. But that it is visible is strongly implied by *τόδε* in 1000, as Woodhouse saw (p. 240). Probably we must add something representing a rock to our picture of the scenery. That is not to say that the stage rock need have been more than two or three feet high. But this whole passage (in contrast to the next I shall discuss) is perhaps one of the rare cases in which stage-directions might have told us something that we cannot otherwise infer.

1403 *ἀντέρειδε νῦν βάσιν σήν.—εἰς ὅσον γ' ἐγὼ σθένω.*

Lewis Campbell saw correctly that here Neoptolemus is offering Philoctetes his arm or perhaps his shoulder to lean on. The tableau at this point—this at the human level is the only ending possible granted the situation and the natures of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes—must symbolize Neoptolemus' final recognition that Philoctetes both needs and deserves help on his own terms. The actors must link arms and begin a slow and painful exit, Neoptolemus giving real physical assistance (as he did before at 893, where the action redoubled his doubts about deceiving Philoctetes any longer). The long tetrameters are broken here not for speed but to give a sense of difficulty and laboriousness. Jebb rendered 'Now plant thy steps firmly', but his parallel for *ἀντερείδω* in this sense (from Lucian, *Κατάπλους* 4), as he himself observed, is said of someone *refusing* to move. Neoptolemus has just said *στείχωμεν*; Philoctetes did not at first move but exclaimed with joy. Neoptolemus now offers him help, 'support your steps on me'. Philoctetes replies to the suggestion of actual immediate movement *εἰς ὅσον γ' ἐγὼ σθένω*, 'Yes, but don't go too fast for me.' (That is to say, *εἰς ὅσον γ' ἐγὼ σθένω* is elliptical assent to *στείχωμεν* as well as to *ἀντέρειδε*, as Campbell saw; if any word is to be supplied, it is a repeated *στείχωμεν*.) Jebb too often appealed to oblique parallels where Campbell had seen correctly and directly what must be going on on the stage. Twenty uses of a given sense of a word do not prove it the only possible sense; *ratio et res ipsa centum exemplis potiores sunt.* *στείχωμεν*, *ἀντέρειδε* and the tetrameter rhythm are virtual stage-directions. The departure is only emphasized when it is delayed by Neoptolemus' fears in 1404–8, and then begun again a second time after 1408 before divine intervention reverses its destination.

II. Two Linguistic Suggestions[1]

678 *κατ' ἄμπυκα δὴ δρομάδα*

Why *ἄμπυξ* for Ixion's wheel? A hasty reading of LSJ on *ἄμπυξ* might suggest that their first sense, 'a woman's diadem', was much better attested than their second sense, 'a horse's headband', under which they cite only Quintus Smyrnaeus and a Pindaric scholion which alleges that this sense is peculiarly Thessalian. But LSJ themselves under sense (1) diagnose a play on sense (2) at Aeschylus, *Supp.* 431, *ἀγομέναν ἱππαδὸν ἀμπύκων* (schol. *ὡς ἵππον τῆς ἄμπυκος ἑλκομένην*). Moreover *χρυσάμπυξ* in Homer is already an epithet of horses (*Il.* 5. 56); *μοναμπυκία* in Pindar *Ol.* 5. 7 refers to racing a single horse not yoked to a team; and *ἀμπυκτῆρες* and *ἀμπυκτηρία* are worn by horses at Aesch. *Sept.* 461 and Soph. *O.C.* 1069. Several late lexica simply gloss *ἄμπυκες*: *χαλινοί*. That is probably justified even for the classical period. The scholiast on Aesch. *Sept.* 461 (Dindorf, p. 351) is especially precise and doubtless correct; *ἀμπυκτῆρσιν*: *χαλινοῖς. κυρίως οἱ περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἱμάντες τοῦ χαλινοῦ ἄμπυξ καλοῦνται.* The scholiast on Eur. *Hec.* 465 refers to a further association contained in the term: *κυρίως κόσμος τις χρυσῷ καὶ λίθοις πεποικιλμένος, ὃν περὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αἱ γυναῖκες φοροῦσιν· ἀφ' οὗ κατὰ μεταφορὰν καὶ οἱ διάχρυσοι χαλινοὶ ἄμπυκες λέγονται.* To rearrange this information: *ἄμπυξ* should be glossed (1) 'a woman's diadem, especially one of gold'; (2) 'a horse's headband, especially one of gold'; (3) 'a horse's bridle, especially

[1] Mr. A. H. Coxon scrutinized this section for me.

one with a golden headband'. The transference from (2) 'headband' to (3) 'bridle (as a whole)' is confirmed by the play in *Supp.* 431; a horse is led by its bridle, not by its headband. To apply all this to Ixion's wheel: it was round; it was golden because fiery (schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1185, Cook, *Zeus*, i. 198–211); and it was the bridle of his insolence. For the *στόμιον* as an image of *σωφρονισμός* see Helen North's appendix in her study, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca, 1965). The Greek army was the *στόμιον Τροίας*; Prometheus' rock was his *πέτρινοι χαλινοί* (Aesch. *Agam.* 132, *P.V.* 562, 1009). Pindar's phrase of Pegasus' bridle at *Ol.* 13. 65, *χρυσάμπυξ χαλινός*, exploits simultaneous overtones of tautology and precision: 'a bridle that was a bridle of gold' and 'a bridle with a headband of gold'. Sophocles here exploits the transference of *ἄμπυξ* differently but with equal richness; in a horse's bridle only the headband is circular, but in Ixion's *ἄμπυξ* the fiery circle *is* the bridle.

931 *ἀπεστέρηκας τὸν βίον τὰ τόξ' ἑλών,*
cf. 933 *τὸν βίον με μὴ ἀφέλῃς,*
1282 *τὸν βίον λαβὼν | ἀπεστέρηκας.*

Line 931 and its two echoes raise a problem on which there is a danger that modern taste may be a poor guide. Jebb asserted 'This verse . . . indicates the sensitiveness of the Athenian ear to accent. For if *βίον* could have been mistaken for *βιόν*, the effect would have been as unhappy as when the actor pronounced *γαλήν*' too much like *γαλῆν*. (Ar. *Frogs* 304.)' Jebb's assumption of the unhappiness of the effect is not necessarily correct. W. D. Woodhead in his thesis *Etymologising in Greek Literature* (pub. Toronto 1930) cautiously remarked 'a critic might suggest . . . that Sophocles is playing upon the word *βιός*; but it is extremely dangerous to dogmatize upon passages such as these'. But Woodhead referred to two passages where plays on *βιός/βίος* are unmistakable. At Ar. *Plutus* 34–5 *τὸν ἐμὸν . . . ἐκτετοξεῦσθαι βίον* is certainly a pun on Aristophanes' part, though perhaps unintentional on Chremylus' part (the old man is unfortunate in his choice of flowery language). More famous is Heraclitus, fr. 48, *τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος*, 'the bow's name is life but its work is death'.[1] Heraclitus' remark only has point if (1) it was believed that something significant was revealed about an object by its name; in this case that a bow in some sense represents a Heraclitean juxtaposition of the opposites life and death; and (2) *βιός* = the name of a *τόξον* and *βίος* = the opposite of *θάνατος* could be believed by the Greeks to be the same word, or at least so similar that their meanings must be closely related. The pun in the *Plutus* shows that an actor could suggest both words at once if he wanted to; but equally Jebb is probably right in holding that with a normal delivery *τὸν βίον* even next to *τὰ τόξα* could have been quite unambiguous. It is the sentence from Heraclitus that raises more doubts. We must consider the possibility that, without necessarily intending any direct echo of Heraclitus or allusion to his philosophy, Sophocles may have been displaying the same attitude to etymology as Heraclitus. He may have been hinting that for Philoctetes his *τόξα* = *βιός* was all too rightly named, since it was indeed his *βίος*, his means of livelihood. There is no humour in the situation, and the word-echo here would in no way be a pun, but a sign of what in Philoctetes' life was a vital truth. Sophocles played on *Αἴας* and *αἰαῖ* at *Ajax* 430, and on

[1] See G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus, The Cosmic Fragments*, Cambridge, 1954, pp. 116–22.

two senses of *νόμισμα* at *Antigone* 296; he gave words unusual senses based on etymologies at frr. 761, 789, 1111. Etymology in his day did not respect differences in accentuation; see Plato, *Cratylus* 399 a 8–9, *τὰς ὀξύτητας μεταβάλλομεν*, and cf. *πυός/πύον*, Empedocles fr. 68 *apud* Aristotle, *de gen. an.* 777[a]7 sq., and *ἀιδής/ἄιδης apud* Plato, *Gorg.* 493 b 4 (see Dodds's note.)[1] However little we ourselves care for it, we cannot exclude the possibility that Philoctetes' triple iteration of *ἀπεστέρηκας τὸν βίον* was meant as having strong pathetic effect through word-echo.

The distaste that may be felt for this word-echo perhaps rests partly on a feeling that this is no time for Philoctetes to engage in sophisms. But in fact the meaning of the word-play is only what line 931 has as its literal meaning before any overtones are detected. We may, if we like, believe that Philoctetes did not intend the word-play, but Sophocles intended the audience to hear it. That would be not unlike Sophocles' frequent use of irony; Philoctetes would seem to speak truer than he knew.

III AND IV. PLOT-STRUCTURE

Both these sections may be prefaced with some general remarks about plot-structure.

In considering the 'dramatic grammar' of a play, the way the plot is constructed to produce emotional effects out of the sequence of events and scenes, two principles must be kept in mind:

(1) a dramatist has no time to waste, and must be presumed to intend each part of his play to have some appropriate dramatic effect;

(2) certain dramatic effects are dependent on the audience's not knowing what is to follow, or (more precisely) they are destroyed if the audience do know what is to follow; obviously suspense is impossible if the audience know in advance how a dilemma will be resolved, or know that the dilemma is only apparent because only one solution is possible; equally it is impossible to create grief and pity by representing a disaster if the audience know that the disaster will soon be remedied or is only apparent.

Taken together these principles produce the following result:

(1)+(2) if certain passages would lack dramatic effect if the audience knew what was to follow, that is sufficient proof that the dramatist intended that the audience should not know what was to follow, and equally that they should not be able to predict it with certainty.

Critics who know how a play ends tend to reread the play seeing only signs that point forward to the, to them foreknown, final turn of events; they forget that the dramatist intended to lead an unknowing audience to the end through a sequence of events which they were not immediately intended to recognize as false turnings. Moreover the dramatist may be presumed to have contrived any 'false turnings' for some better reason than merely to string out his plot. The effect made by a play's final conclusion may to a large extent depend on the degree to which it contrasts with or reinforces the effects of previous turns of the plot; or on occasion a quiet final conclusion may contribute less to the total effect of the play than earlier events in the plot that were perhaps more

[1] Mr. Michael Stokes adds *Δία . . . ὅν τε διά* from Hesiod, *Erga* 2–3.

alarming or had greater impact in some other way. But (I repeat) what must be remembered is that the audience are not intended, and are not in a position, to make the critic's mistake of discounting any scene as it plays on the ground that it does not represent or does not contribute to the final resolution of the plot.

III. The Abandonment of Philoctetes and the Oracle of Helenus

I wish to restore to Sophocles' play two essential dramatic effects of which several recent critics have robbed it; suspense from line 776 to line 865, when it seems possible, or even probable, that Philoctetes will be abandoned without his bow; and horror from 1054 to 1217, when it seems certain that Philoctetes has been so abandoned. The critics have destroyed these effects by postulating that the oracle of Helenus prohibited the abandonment of Philoctetes, and that the audience are therefore able to deduce at 776–865 that Philoctetes in fact cannot be in real danger of being abandoned, and at 1054–1217 that despite appearances he cannot actually have been abandoned. I shall argue that Sophocles cannot have wished his audience to make any such deductions.

(*a*) 1054–1217. *Odysseus' abandonment of Philoctetes*

It will be simpler to take the later passage first. Tycho von Wilamowitz's excellent chapter on this play made the requisite point in 1917,[1] and much subsequent debate could have been avoided if this point had been remembered. Jebb and Radermacher, holding that the prophecy of Helenus required not only Philoctetes' bow but Philoctetes himself to be brought to Troy, concluded that Odysseus' abandonment of Philoctetes at 1054 sq. must be a bluff, a ruse to frighten him into changing his mind. Tycho von Wilamowitz, besides questioning how the audience were to know that a ruse was intended, replied that the assumption that Odysseus was not in earnest would completely destroy the effect of the succeeding scene. That is true and conclusive. Philoctetes is given a long and moving scene in which he laments over his fate when now abandoned without his bow. But the audience will not be moved by his lament if the situation prompting it is known or strongly suspected by them to be false. If they are merely waiting to see how soon Odysseus returns they will hardly even listen to Philoctetes' words. His pathetic, apparently final, disappearance into his cave at 1217 will have no effect if the audience have any strong reason to think it will not in fact be final. The audience may hope, as of course Sophocles intends them to hope, that some deliverance will still occur; but for them to be sure that it will would be fatal to the dramatic effect. It must seem fully possible that Odysseus meant all that he said when he left at 1080.

It is therefore certain that Sophocles did not expect his audience to think that capturing the bow without its owner was an impossible response to the oracle of Helenus. That gives us a fixed premiss from which to approach the puzzle about what the oracle said. That puzzle will be discussed later. First the same fixed premiss must be confirmed from another passage in the play.

[1] *Die Dramatische Technik des Sophokles*, Berlin, 1917 (= Phil. Untersuch. xxii), p. 304.

(*b*) 776–865. *Neoptolemus' refusal to abandon Philoctetes*

At line 776 Philoctetes hands his bow to Neoptolemus. The audience by now are strongly sympathetic to Philoctetes, and immediately sense the possibility, or even fear the probability, of a disastrous consequence for him. The bow having been obtained, will Philoctetes himself perhaps now be abandoned once again in a far more helpless plight than before? The danger of this seems even greater when Philoctetes collapses at 820; worse still, Neoptolemus' sailors suggest exactly this plan of action at 827–64. It is a great relief to the audience that Neoptolemus shows reluctance at 839–42 and then subsequently that Philoctetes awakens at 865 before Neoptolemus can yield to his sailors' repeated urging. From 776 to 865, in fact, the audience are kept in suspense; will Neoptolemus abandon Philoctetes or will he not? Sophocles of course wishes to place emphasis on Neoptolemus' refusal to abandon Philoctetes; he does so by making the refusal occur in a moment of suspense and tension. But the audience will only be in suspense if they do not know, and cannot foresee with certainty, what Neoptolemus will do. The full dramatic force of this scene of the play depends on the audience's not having any sufficient reason to predict Neoptolemus' refusal; therefore we can conclude that Sophocles, in his own view, had not given them sufficient reason to predict it.

But this, it may be said, is all very well as far as lines 839–42. There can be suspense until Neoptolemus reports the oracle of Helenus; but thereafter we know that he cannot be about to abandon Philoctetes because he could not think of disobeying the oracle. But if we now know this, surely Neoptolemus' sailors must realize it too. What then are we to make of their repeated attempt to persuade Neoptolemus? Are they simply being stupid (as has been suggested[1])? But here we must remember principle (1) described above; it is impossible to believe that Sophocles wastes twenty-two lines allowing the sailors to urge a suggestion which the audience know cannot possibly be accepted. If Sophocles gave the sailors these lines we must find a better point in them. This point is in fact obvious: Sophocles clearly wished to prolong the period of tension during which it is uncertain whether or not Philoctetes will be abandoned. The sailors evidently do not regard Neoptolemus' report of the oracle as conclusive. They still think he ought to take what he can, that is to say the bow, while he can. Moreover Sophocles could evidently expect his audience still to have some fears that the sailors had a strong enough point for there to be danger that Neoptolemus would yield to their persuasion. The tension is ended only when Philoctetes begins to awaken before Neoptolemus has weakened.

But how can this be? Surely, when Neoptolemus says τοῦτον θεὸς εἶπε κομίζειν in 841, that is so unambiguous that the sailors cannot ignore it without either seeming stupid or implying that they doubt Neoptolemus' word? But in fact they cannot be being allowed to seem stupid, and they need not be implying that they disbelieve Neoptolemus' report. What they are most probably reflecting is precisely the attitude of practically minded men when faced with the kind of dilemma that oracles often produced. The dilemma here is this; how literally must one take the words of an oracle, if to be rigidly literal seems to mean one cannot fulfil the oracle at all, whereas if one assumes that one

[1] By A. E. Hinds, *C.Q.* xvii (1967), 175, who says, 'I doubt if this (silliness) should trouble us in a chorus.' But choruses are not allowed to be silly to no dramatic purpose.

need not be exact about all details one can achieve what seems to be the most important part of the oracle's requirement?

It is worth reflecting briefly on the impact of oracles in general. We are rather less familiar with oracles than Greek audiences were; we have a rather less clear impression of the difficulties an oracle could create for an individual in planning his course of action.

There might be several difficulties in planning one's life in the face of a prophecy: (1) the oracle might be obscure, or ambiguous, or both; (2) it might be clear enough about the main predicted facts, but unspecific about related details, or clear about an end but unspecific about the means to it; (3) it might prophesy something the fulfilment of which no one desired, or some men desired, or some men desired and some did not; (4) its fulfilment, whether or not desired, would often seem impossible or in the highest degree improbable; or if the god's presumed veracity was taken to gurantee its fulfilment, the means of its fulfilment would be completely unguessable. How to act in the face of some or all of these difficulties was usually unclear. But (5) the logical impossibility of frustrating a true prophecy never, I think, deterred the Greeks from precautionary action; even the most devout believer could hope that he might successfully prevent an apparently doomed disaster, since if he succeeded that would only prove that the oracle probably meant something quite different. Moreover (6),[1] even if one accepted that a given prophecy was unambiguous, infallible, and inescapable, one could still try to arrange for a trouble-free life until the disaster struck; one was not bound to accelerate the disaster; indeed there might well be a long waiting period to get through, during which everyday rational decisions were still required, however difficult they might seem.[2]

It is of course a naïve, though frequent, error to assume that a pious Greek was under an obligation to promote the fulfilment of an oracle. Oedipus is not usually blamed for trying to frustrate the oracles about him; in fact he had a strong religious obligation to frustrate the prophecies that he would murder his father and marry his mother. In his case difficulties (2) and (4) operated; the oracle did not disabuse him about his parents' identity, and that being so, he was unlikely to guess how he had failed to take sufficient steps to prevent the prophecy's being fulfilled.

To turn back to Helenus. Suppose Helenus said (those who wish may turn this into hexameters: I shall discuss later the extent of our need to know the actual words): 'Bring Neoptolemus and Philoctetes; for they, with Heracles' bow, will this summer capture Troy.' On the face of it, this would be an unusually clear oracle, especially satisfactory because it indicated the means of its own fulfilment; Heracles' unerring bow would finally bring down Troy. But when later in Lemnos a possibility arose that the bow could be got back to Troy without Philoctetes, it would be found that the oracle was of little help in deciding whether to seize this chance. The bow with its divine sureness of aim would seem to practical men to be the main requirement; the oracle might only have mentioned bringing Philoctetes as a normal means of getting the bow to Troy. After all Philoctetes was wounded; even if he was to be cured,[3] waiting till he could himself use the bow in battle would delay Troy's capture.

[1] As Professor Dover reminds me.

[2] Professor Knox gives a documented and less schematic account of the difficulties posed by oracles in his *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven, 2nd printing, 1965), pp. 35 sq.

[3] I shall discuss this below.

Neoptolemus at 839–42 tries to insist that τοῦτον θεὸς εἶπε κομίζειν will not be satisfied by bringing only the bow, but the practical necessity of being literalist at this juncture is not evident, and Neoptolemus does not, and apparently cannot, produce any practical argument. The sailors therefore in effect continue to urge that he should not let slip his chance of capturing the key weapon merely because the oracle at one point instead of mentioning the bow mentioned its owner. Any Greek audience familiar with the problems that could arise over the requirements of the oracles would suspect at once that this was a strong practical argument that might well wear down Neoptolemus' resistance. Sophocles does not show Neoptolemus strengthening or even repeating his refusal of 839–42; the audience have relief from their fears only when Philoctetes awakens.

A strong reason, in addition to maintaining the audience's fears, why Sophocles allows the sailors to continue to press their point is that he wishes the audience to feel that something remains unexplained at this moment about Neoptolemus' motives. He does not wish Neoptolemus' apparent literalism about the words of the oracle to be taken to be an adequate explanation of his refusal to abandon Philoctetes; he wishes to hint that he must have some further reason for staying. And of course Neoptolemus' unexplained motives do indeed turn out to have nothing to do with legalistic precision over the interpretation of the oracle. In fifty lines' time, at 895 sq., the audience see Neoptolemus abandon the attempt to deceive Philoctetes any longer. Then they have the true explanation of his utterance and behaviour at 832–64; he is in favour of bringing Philoctetes himself to Troy not out of fidelity to an interpretation of the oracle, but because his human feelings for Philoctetes are already sufficient to make him refuse to abandon him. At 839 sq. he does not explain himself but falls back on a distinctly 'oracular' reference to the oracle, 'oracular' not merely because he speaks in hexameters but also because he does not produce arguments for his interpretation. But at 895 his surprise change of policy seems all the more convincing when it occurs because it explains his odd behaviour earlier.[1]

To recapitulate the argument so far; Sophocles is able to produce tension from 776 to 865 by threatening the abandonment of Philoctetes, and horror from 1054 to 1217 by representing his apparently actual abandonment, despite the oracle of Helenus, because his audience would accept easily that Neoptolemus might be tempted, and Odysseus had been tempted, to assume that to return with the bow but without Philoctetes was much nearer to the fulfilment of the oracle and to the practical achievement of the sack of Troy than to return with neither bow nor Philoctetes.

I must now declare my position on some questions raised in previous discussions of the oracle of Helenus. A. E. Hinds, in a detailed and sensitive article in *C.Q.* N.S. xvii (1967) pp. 169–80, reviews the problem and many of the suggested solutions at length, but comes to conclusions with which it will have been evident that I do not agree. It will be apparent that, among other things, I do not even entirely agree with the points which on p. 170 he takes to be

[1] That literalism about oracles is not Neoptolemus' true motive has been said before; see G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca, 1958), p. 147. The empty sententiousness of 842 was noticed but wrongly explained by Kitto, *Form and Meaning*, p. 120: it is Neoptolemus, not Sophocles, who is embarrassed by the thinness of his utterance.

generally accepted. I shall not attack his article point by point; many of his observations are of great interest even where his deductions from them seem to me unsound; but I hope the following remarks will show the lines on which I would reply to him.

Sophocles at no point allows any of his characters to purport to quote the exact words of the oracle of Helenus *verbatim* and in full, uncut, unexpanded, and uninterpreted. This is surely deliberate; the audience are not to be invited to form their own opinions on what any alleged precise wording of the oracle would imply or not imply. Nor are the audience meant to try to guess at possible wordings of the oracle or debate them in their minds. They are meant to believe that the oracle suggested that the most important requirement for the capture of Troy was the unerring bow. This being in the possession of Philoctetes, as a special gift from Heracles, the audience at first will take it to follow that Philoctetes must come to Troy. In the prologue there is talk, it is true, of Neoptolemus' becoming the κλοπεύς of the bow (77), but there is no suggestion there that this 'theft' is to be more than the separating of Philoctetes from his bow for long enough to save Odysseus and Neoptolemus from attack while Philoctetes is being persuaded to come to Troy. The possibility of taking the bow but not Philoctetes to Troy has not yet been envisaged; that would be much more serious and literal theft, and while if Odysseus had it in mind, he might have reason not to mention it to Neoptolemus, there is nevertheless at this stage no need to believe he has yet contemplated it himself. Indeed, as Professor Knox[1] has pointed out, his later actions suggest that even if he had earlier envisaged this complete and ruthless theft, he did not actually intend to put so desperate a plan into practice until after he had suffered the curses of Philoctetes at 1004–44. At 1000–4 he prevents Philoctetes from suicide; only at 1047 does he make his notorious excuse *οὐ γὰρ τοιούτων δεῖ, τοιοῦτός εἰμ' ἐγώ*, and undertake responsibility for both outright theft of the bow and the murder, in effect, of its owner. Even Odysseus can have hesitated over these crimes earlier. I think this makes sense of the much-debated ambiguities of the prologue. It is true that often Odysseus talks of the bow while Neoptolemus replies in terms of bringing Philoctetes; but note that at 116 even Neoptolemus agrees *θηρατέ' ἄ⟨ρα⟩ γίγνοιτ' ἄν*, sc. *τὰ τόξα*. Odysseus has quite sufficient personal reasons for being obsessed with the bow, and Sophocles lets his obsession appear; but there is no need to ascribe to him at this stage a plot to abandon the bow's owner, nor is Neoptolemus yet making a conscious refusal to abandon him; Neoptolemus is quite simply in slightly less danger from the bow than Odysseus is.

What the false merchant says about the oracle at 604 sq. is part of a narrative meant to frighten Philoctetes on to Neoptolemus' ship, and need not be taken to record the truth; the reason why the merchant represents the oracle as saying *εἰ μὴ τόνδε πείσαντες λόγῳ ἄγοιντο* (612–13) is that he wants to strengthen his suggestions of how desperately Odysseus showed himself prepared to behave when he said that he would bring Philoctetes even if he was not willing—*εἰ μὴ θέλοι δ', ἄκοντα* (618). What the merchant says about the oracle need be no more true in detail than what he says about Odysseus.

What Neoptolemus says about the oracle in 839–42 we have already discussed. The sailors are not calling Neoptolemus a liar when they pass over his argument that the oracle said *τοῦτον θεὸς εἶπε κομίζειν*; nor should we. But,

[1] *The Heroic Temper*, p. 192 n. 38.

as was seen above, what he says does not imply that the oracle added the specific proviso 'Do *not* bring the bow without Philoctetes'; the way the sailors react implies that the oracle was not specific on this possibility. But what of Neoptolemus' assertion τοῦδε γὰρ ὁ στέφανος? Again, from the way the sailors react, the audience will assume that this can be judged to be merely Neoptolemus' own expansion of the oracle, meant to impress the sailors but rejected by them. Here again, of course, Sophocles is not so much giving the audience time and opportunity to debate the oracle's precise words as hurrying them over Neoptolemus' statement of the oracle into the rejection of his interpretation by the sailors, and trying to suggest to the audience that Neoptolemus' motivation is not sufficiently explained by the arguments he can base on the oracle.

Eyebrows have been raised at 1328 sq., and much has sometimes been made of what Neoptolemus is allowed to assert about the oracle there. But of course Neoptolemus is there concerned to emphasize as strongly as possible the advantages to Philoctetes of his going to Troy; he is expanding the oracle now for a new purpose to a new hearer. The audience will hardly now ask whether what he says is strictly what the oracle said, or why he did not say it all before; they will be quite satisfied with the plausibility of his claim that the Asclepidae could cure Philoctetes, and they will hope Philoctetes will believe this. (Professor Knox[1] has pointed out that at 1437 Heracles promises, not that the Asclepidae, but that Asclepius himself will cure Philoctetes. Sophocles is hardly likely to have wanted the audience at that point to turn to each other and say 'so Neoptolemus was a liar' or 'the oracle was wrong then'; he can only have wanted them to be impressed by Heracles' promise, and if they noticed the difference between Asclepius and his sons, to say 'even better than we hoped when Neoptolemus talked of the cure before'.)

Finally, what Heracles says in the concluding scene of course is not evidence for what the oracle said; Heracles has his own divine foreknowledge. At 1434–5 οὔτε γὰρ σὺ τοῦδ' ἄτερ σθένεις | ἑλεῖν τὸ Τροίας πεδίον οὔθ' οὗτος σέθεν certainly confirms Neoptolemus' interpretation of the oracle; but note that Heracles is expressly addressing this to Neoptolemus; it is a warning to him not to go back on his interpretation, so presumably there was room to add detail as well as authority to the original oracle. On the other hand, at 1439–40 Heracles utters words which if they echo those of Helenus might justify those who interpreted Helenus' oracle as recommending greater concern for the bow than for Philoctetes: τὸ δεύτερον γὰρ τοῖς ἐμοῖς αὐτὴν χρεὼν | τόξοις ἁλῶναι. If the oracle alluded to Troy's second capture by the bow *of Heracles*, this might have allowed Philoctetes to seem only secondarily the bow's owner and helped to make its theft from him seem less culpable.

To recapitulate this whole note: Sophocles did not want the audience at this play to think of the oracle of Helenus as though it were a prophecy so clear, full, and specific that no doubts could ever arise over the relative importance for the capture of Troy of Philoctetes himself as opposed to his bow. The importance of the bow was obvious; the importance of Philoctetes himself was not, once one was forced to consider him separately from his bow. At first to consider him separately would have seemed to be excluded because it meant envisaging a crime of outright, and not merely temporary, theft; but as events turned out, it began to seem that only the bow could be got, and then it

[1] *The Heroic Temper*, pp. 188–9.

could seem either that that was after all the oracle's main requirement, or that that was as near as could be come to fulfilment of the oracle in practice. If this account of the matter is right, then true suspense is restored at 766–865, and true horror at 1054–1217. The need for the restoration of these dramatic effects seems to me to be unquestionable, and I would therefore reject all suggestions about Sophocles' intentions that destroy these effects.

By way of corollary, I will recall a point touched earlier in passing. Neoptolemus at one point refuses to abandon Philoctetes, Odysseus in the end does abandon him. Sophocles is not primarily concerned to depict Neoptolemus as pious in his fidelity to oracles, and Odysseus as merely impious in ignoring them. Neoptolemus' virtue is his kindness of heart in refusing to leave Philoctetes to starve. Odysseus' vice is his hardness of heart in being prepared if necessary to do just that. Neoptolemus' virtue is something more than fidelity to oracles, Odysseus' vice is worse than neglect of oracles. I think it is no diminution of Sophocles' piety to argue that in this play he was writing more about the importance of human sympathy than about literal obedience to oracles.

IV. The Two Conclusions to the Play

1402–8

The necessity that the audience shall be able to take seriously what they see happening on the stage, without any preconceptions that something different must later supervene, applies with especial force to the first of the play's two conclusions. This first conclusion is in one sense false, since another conclusion does supervene; but in another sense it is true, for the whole play builds up to this conclusion, not to the second. Philoctetes has refused to go to Troy even after a full and no longer deceitful explanation of the situation; Neoptolemus has agreed, and begun, to escort him home to Malis. Sophocles surely meant the audience to understand this as being at the human level perhaps not the ideal outcome of the previous cruelties and confusions, not the best that could have been hoped for, but the best that could be attained; an outcome in which Philoctetes is behaving in an entirely justifiable manner, Neoptolemus in a wholly admirable manner. The natural result of the Greeks' cruelty to Philoctetes has become evident; he will do nothing more for them no matter what they promise him. He would have been justified in refusing to go to Troy even if there had never been any attempt to trick him into going; as it is he has even better justification. Neoptolemus has shown his true character by abandoning his stratagems of deceit; more than that, he has broken off his loyalty to the Greeks for the sake of Philoctetes alone. To do anything but what he does do would result only in worse cruelty to Philoctetes than ever before; on the other hand the cost to Neoptolemus of taking Philoctetes not to Troy but to Malis may well be what he predicts at 1405, the sack of his homeland.

It is true that the supervention of Heracles' command to Philoctetes to go to Troy does not in itself prevent us on reflection from seeing Neoptolemus' nobility or Philoctetes' stubbornness in the light I have just described; but these points will be much more vividly grasped by the audience if for the space of the slow tetrameters at 1402–8 they take seriously the appearance that this is the real end of the play. A moment must be given them in which they have seriously to assess the consequence of the behaviour of these two men, and realize how much it will cost Neoptolemus especially to do what he is doing,

and how completely uninterested in glory and Greek victory Philoctetes has become now that he can hardly bring himself to trust any man. Sophocles does not prolong the scene so long that when Heracles appears and reverses Philoctetes' destination the audience will feel deceived; but he ensures its vividness while it lasts (see note above on 1403) and he has given no hint at all up to this time that this is not the most and the best that can now be done. Any advance hint that Neoptolemus was making what would turn out to be merely a symbolic gesture whose consequences he would not in the end have to face would have diminished the dramatic impact of the unselfishness revealed in *εἰ δοκεῖ, στείχωμεν* at 1402. This is not to say that the audience are not meant to be greatly relieved for Neoptolemus' sake when Heracles provides a better solution; but the full effect of the scene requires that they must not *expect* another solution any more than Neoptolemus himself does.

Two conditions are accordingly necessary for this scene to have its full effect: (1) that knowledge of Helenus' oracle shall not have given the audience strong enough grounds to think this cannot be Sophocles' true conclusion to the play; (2) that knowledge of the traditional form of the myth shall not have done so either.

That oracles often did not reveal the manner of their own fulfilment we have already seen; even when Neoptolemus wants (though Philoctetes does not want) to fulfil Helenus' prophecy, he cannot be blamed if he decides that its fulfilment is not something he can himself achieve, and takes a step which is prompted by other motives. If he had any hope that the gods might still arrange that Philoctetes should eventually go to Troy, he would have no reason on the evidence before him to believe that the gods would find it more difficult to arrange from Malis than from Lemnos. A more important point, in view of what has sometimes been written, is that we shall not blame Philoctetes for not wishing to try to fulfil Helenus' oracle. Philoctetes could easily assume that the oracle implied, 'if you can get Philoctetes to Troy, you will be victorious; if not, you will fail'; and he has excellent reasons for wanting them to fail. Even if Philoctetes accepted Neoptolemus' unconditional and positive reading of the oracle, *ὡς δεῖ γενέσθαι ταῦτα* (1339), that would not in itself bind him to promote its fulfilment; as we saw above, Oedipus was bound to try to frustrate the prophecies about himself.

But what of the audience's knowledge of the traditional form of the myth? Are they perhaps going to say at 1408, 'but we know he cannot end the play here'? I am arguing that the way Sophocles constructed his play and the effects he intended show quite clearly that though the audience might not, before the play began, have expected the way the play seemed now to be going to end, they would not have totally rejected this ending. They would have followed the events as Sophocles presented them and seen to what result they led. Sophocles was not writing for an audience who at 1402 were going to think 'this is an episode of no real interest because we know the facts were not so'. It is probable enough that many Athenians in 409 B.C. still regarded the myths as basically historical; but they were fully accustomed to the existence of variant versions of the myths;[1] if Sophocles presented a new version of the Philoctetes legend, those who took the myths historically would assume

[1] Professor Dover reminds me that of course variant versions of myths were no new thing in the fifth century: as he remarks, 'the poets' exercise of choice and modifications was built into poetic treatment of myth right from the beginning'.

that Sophocles intended to give what seemed to him a truer account of historical probabilities. Sophocles' point in no small part was precisely that the legend that the Greeks first abandoned Philoctetes for ten years, then easily enlisted his services again, was totally implausible, especially if they used Odysseus to bring him to Troy. The play is designed to present Philoctetes' stubbornness as justified and natural, the Greeks' cruelty as abominable and rightly recoiling on their own heads. To do this Sophocles suggests that if the myth is history, then history needs rewriting; no man treated as Philoctetes had been could ever have swallowed his justified resentment and fought again for the Greeks.

I labour this point because many writers show great anxiety to analyse the details of variant treatments of mythology, while at the same time they grotesquely overestimate the general restrictions that the traditional mythology placed on the Greek playwright. A Greek tragedian is hardly likely to have wanted to be taken to have used or invented a variant legend for no purpose but variety. It would be much more reasonable to wonder whether the historicity the Greeks attached to their myths may not in fact to some extent have increased the significance of a tragedian's introduction of a variant legend; by stressing the plausibility of his chosen variant a playwright was offering a new insight into history. This argument could be taken too far; but even Euripides' reinterpretations of legend were by no means always frivolous. But at the very least we must admit that in choosing a variant legend a playwright had its *dramatic* possibilities in mind, and was not merely contriving a novelty; and for the dramatic possibilities of a variant to be realized, the audience cannot have watched it being presented with a continuous certainty that 'he will have to introduce a *deus ex machina* to put this right'. They watched Neoptolemus leading Philoctetes to Malis with great relief that Philoctetes was not to be again abandoned, and great admiration for the young man putting right the wrongs done by his elders.

1409–*end*

But if Sophocles was making serious points in his first conclusion, why did he add a second conclusion? The answer is certainly not 'because certain impressions left by the first conclusion required to be corrected'.

It must first be emphasized that although foreknowledge of it would weaken the effect of the first conclusion, the second conclusion when it comes in no way weakens or cancels any of the dramatic points that have been made in the first conclusion. Philoctetes' stubbornness is not in the end shown to have been at all unjustified; that it is Heracles who eventually secures Philoctetes' agreement to go to Troy implies that hardly anyone else could have secured it, certainly no man. Moreover Heracles does not, as is sometimes said, persuade Philoctetes to go; he commands him. He promises him the rewards of health and victory, but he does not try to argue with him that his stubbornness is unjustified, or that he has a duty to the Greeks, or that he ought to help fulfil oracles, or that it could be a pleasure to mix with the heroes again. There is no discussion; Heracles uses only direct futures and imperatives; Philoctetes replies *οὐκ ἀπιθήσω τοῖς σοῖς μύθοις* (1447); Philoctetes has special obligations to Heracles; it is for these that he goes.

Rather than rebuking Philoctetes' stubbornness, Heracles suggests that he is entitled to a reward for his sufferings. This does not explicitly touch on, and

need not imply, commendation for his stubbornness; but equally along with the lack of blame for it it tends to imply that Sophocles did not intend to destroy any judgement the audience might have made that the stubbornness was at least entirely natural. Heracles says nothing at all about the Greeks who abandoned Philoctetes, except that they will judge him first in the whole army for his ἀρετή and award him the ἀριστεῖα (1425 and 1429). No doubt the audience by now sympathize with Philoctetes' view of the Greeks; Heracles does not confirm this view but does little to correct it.

Heracles similarly says nothing by way of praise or blame for Neoptolemus. His part in the capture of Troy is foretold, and the audience can feel relief that he will not have to suffer the consequences of his kindness to Philoctetes. Presumably the audience's own judgement of Neoptolemus is intended to remain unchanged, in the same way as their judgement of Philoctetes' stubbornness. There would of course be a danger that any comment on Neoptolemus' nobility by Heracles, who was rendering it superfluous, might sound patronizing or belittling; probably Sophocles thought the point was better left alone.

The second conclusion of the play, then, does nothing to destroy the effects of the first conclusion.[1] Little is explicitly spoken to confirm them, but the audience's possible fears that the behaviour of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus will have disastrous consequences for both are mercifully allayed. What is said is said swiftly, with no extended comment by Heracles; his only remarks beyond instructions and predictions are that all is the plan of Zeus, and that Zeus will still require piety from the victors (1415 and 1400 sq.).

The second conclusion is thus not used by Sophocles for passing explicit moral comments on what has gone before. It might, however, be expected that it would do something to explain the views of the gods on what has occurred; Euripidean prologues and *deus ex machina* speeches often did this. But Sophocles allows Heracles to say very little even about this. He claims that his predictions represent τὰ Διὸς βουλεύματα; Philoctetes shall be rewarded for his πόνοι. But nothing is said to show why Philoctetes was condemned to these πόνοι in the first place. Neoptolemus has tried to explain these at 191–200 and 1316–28, but he has not of course justified the gods' behaviour from the gods' point of view. He said that Philoctetes' sufferings were of divine origin, coming from the cruel Chryse because of his offence of approaching her shrine; he is suffering τύχαι ἐκ θεῶν (1316–17)—note the phrase—probably as part of some divine plan to delay the fall of Troy. This only invites one to wonder whether this divine plan has not been allowed to bear much too heavily on Philoctetes. He was trapped into an offence, evidently, and has had ten years' of horrifying punishment for it. But beyond the suggestion that Zeus will make this up to him, Heracles gives him no justification for his victimization.

Sophocles seems more than once to us to have felt little obligation—or perhaps no presumption—to justify the ways of gods to men, except occasionally to remind them, as at the end of the *Trachiniae*, that οὐδὲν τούτων ὅτι μὴ Ζεύς. Why are such appalling τύχαι ἐκ θεῶν allowed to happen to Oedipus? Why does Eurydice die, but not Creon, in the *Antigone*?[2] We are not told. Nor are we given any justification of Zeus' plans for Philoctetes, except in so far as there is a rough justice in his winning the ἀριστεῖα at Troy.

[1] I am here repeating points made by both Linforth and Kitto.

[2] The *dramatic* reasons are clear, of course; but the theological reasons?

So the second conclusion of the play does not do quite all that one might think it would. It is short, and in certain limited respects highly satisfactory to an audience already sympathetic to Philoctetes and admiring Neoptolemus. But beyond this limited reversal of future troubles it seems calculated to change as little as possible, and to add as little as possible to, any judgements the audience have already made for themselves.

This lightness or slightness of the second conclusion does much, I think, to emphasize that it is the first conclusion which is the true conclusion that Sophocles wishes to leave dominant in our minds. This is a play about the behaviour of two men under stress in a strange situation. The real interest is to see how after initial false moves they ultimately react to each other. What the plans of the gods may be for the ultimate capture of Troy is not after all the main point focused in the audience's minds. It is true that the mechanism of the plot begins from the wish of the Greeks to use Philoctetes or his bow at Troy, but equally true that the audience are hardly induced to become involved with the capture of Troy as the principal issue. They are much more directly involved in the immediate question whether Philoctetes will be released from his imprisonment in Lemnos.

The reasons why Sophocles did not simply omit the second conclusion from the play are, I think, as follows. The solemnity of Greek tragedy as a record of episodes from history did not preclude a tragedian from giving a new interpretation of history, but probably did bind him to provide some hint of how his new interpretation of one episode fitted with other traditional episodes. In other words the audience watching the *Philoctetes* would accept the plausibility and importance of the first conclusion, but would still feel entitled to ask how Troy eventually fell. Euripides would perhaps have explained this at length in a *deus ex machina* speech, at greater length than Sophocles does; his readiness to recount mythology for its own sake was obviously much greater.[1] Sophocles was prepared to meet the audience's wish to hear more, but only in an extremely economical way, in a way that upset as little as possible the previous effects of his play. There was a grave danger, in going on to explain related consequences at length, of raising large issues with which the play as a whole was not concerned. Why did the gods victimize Philoctetes? Sophocles does not tell us. We ought perhaps sometimes to wonder whether his 'unmoralized'[2] and fatalistic piety, far less 'moralized' than Aeschylus', by accepting without question all the gods sent, may not in fact conveniently have allowed him as a tragedian to concentrate on dramatic effects more than on religious thought; he would have less need to give a moralizing, theological shape to his plots. Or again, one could straightforwardly admit that Sophocles used his dramatic 'sleight of hand' to avoid putting too much weight on the questions that might be raised by the theologically minded among his audience. Traditionally Greek tragedy had raised great issues and narrated 'slices of epic' in history; but in the *Philoctetes* Sophocles had reason to want to avoid wide historical issues, because they would have carried him too far beyond the human and

[1] Though it is possible that Euripides made room for complete treatments of the myths partly as a poet's reaction to a problem which purely as a dramatist he found a nuisance. He must have been perfectly conscious that some of his prologues and epilogues were unashamedly undramatic; this represents choice, not incompetence.

[2] I borrow the word from Professor Dodds; see *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), p. 49.

personal situation which he wanted to depict. His solution was the lightly sketched 'second conclusion' as we have it; just enough to suggest that history and theology had not been left out of account; without altering the true focus of the play. Paradoxically enough, simply to reverse the conclusion of the plot provided a neat way of doing all that was needed without spending time on complex explanations. Moreover the danger to Neoptolemus lying in the outcome of the first conclusion could be deservedly removed, so long as care was taken not to belittle the greatness of his intended self-sacrifice; the glory that Philoctetes deserved could be ensured for him without any implied criticism of his justified stubbornness in refusing to help men who had done him such atrocities.

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