

SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES* AND THE HOMERIC EMBASSY

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Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is unusual among the extant plays because it shows three characters each of them central, delineated, interacting with each other, who create a three-way human relationship. The character of Neoptolemus is Sophocles' addition to the story.¹ Perhaps initially Sophocles, the most Homeric of the tragedians, saw in the story an immediate analogue to the Embassy in the ninth book of the *Iliad* and thought he had a kind of Odysseus and Achilles in this Odysseus and Philoctetes. His dramatic genius seized upon the figure of Neoptolemus, whose enthusiasm and youth echo something of Ajax and whose parentage and concern hold up a kind of moral mirror to the action as Phoenix did.

The situation of the *Philoctetes* is that of the ninth book of the *Iliad*. The same group of army leaders, reduced to desperation, aware of how central to their objectives the absent hero is, are forced to send off a mission to persuade him to return. In the *Iliad* Agamemnon sends off Odysseus with the promise of considerable recompense for Achilles. But both in the *Iliad* and in this play there is nothing more than calculated exploitation. Agamemnon's gifts do not represent a change of heart. None of the personal animus which Agamemnon holds toward Achilles has abated; getting him back will be a maneuver. This is obvious in Odysseus' calculated intervention (*Iliad* Θ 223–24) when Phoenix is about to speak, an intervention that suggests a stage manager arranging his scene. There are, however, significant differences

¹ Dio Chrysostom, in his 52nd Discourse, tells us that in the Aeschylean version Odysseus came alone; in the Euripidean version Diomedes accompanied him, but one gets the feeling that he remained silent and that Odysseus and a speaker from the Trojan embassy argued their cases with Philoctetes as a kind of judge or moderator after the fashion of Menelaus between Helen and Hecuba in the *Trojan Women*.

underlying these two plays: first, the fact of the oracle which insists that Philoctetes will return, and second, the circumstances of Philoctetes' exile, which have caused him to hate Odysseus to a degree far beyond the mild contempt that Achilles shows for Odysseus in the *Iliad*. Both give turns to the action independent of the nuances and attitudes stemming from reminiscences of the Homeric embassy.

In this way, too, the *Philoctetes* is different because there so *obviously* stands behind the dramatic moment another completely realized literary scene (because so much is lost we can never know how unusual this may be but it is a remarkable invention or departure in the fragmented history of Greek theater which we know). The similarity between the two scenes extends beyond the obvious, to the spiritual and social dilemmas of the two heroes, or to the motives of the participants and their personal qualities. One thinks, for instance, of Ajax, his ingenuous and spontaneous generosity of love, that sometimes makes Achilles' obdurate stance an exercise in petulance, whose emotion is reflected by Neoptolemus' sympathetic concern before the withdrawn, bitter and rigid Philoctetes. Again, both the ethical dimensions of Phoenix' long speech that has to do with the simple human facts of childhood and old age and the spiritual agony of resisting and yielding seem redefined in Philoctetes' wound, which forces him to an animal existence, and seems alternately to break him and to stiffen his lonely will. Secondary points of identification like these develop because at the obvious level the relationship between the two scenes is so strong. When the audience is caught up in the process of identification between the one scene and the other, and looks for the distinguishing connective elements, the process of conscious projection is begun. A displacement or objectivity which is generally foreign to ancient drama takes place. When we look at the other extant dramas or study the plots, as we know them, of those now lost, we are hard put to find examples of the sort of literary juxtaposition and relationship that Sophocles attempted here.

Like Philoctetes, Achilles has run afoul of a hierarchy. His withdrawal has to do with honor and glory but it also has to do with the relationship of the individual to the group. In the *Iliad's* shame culture Achilles' heroism is very much dependent upon his glory which comes from the army and its hierarchy. These issues are at stake, at

least initially, in the ninth book.² Philoctetes' situation is similar yet more dismal. Instead of retiring from the group, he has been forcibly expelled. All the bitterness that comes from reviewing constantly his almost loss of identity among the Achaians (cf. esp. 249 ff.) produces a kind of venom from which Achilles is free. Philoctetes, too, is forced by the arrival of the Greeks to rethink his position in the group. As has often been remarked, Achilles seems to reveal the first doubtings of the politico-social systems that held together the heroic age. In this sense Philoctetes represents the same mind, now grown old, cynical, and embittered. Yet, ironically, he persists with all the intransigence typical of a hero.

The play continually demands of its audience that they distill out of their knowledge of epic and the poetic tradition it inspired all the heroic qualities conceivable for Philoctetes. The memory of Achilles is invoked in continual reference and reinforced by the presence of his son; the memory reflects upon Philoctetes, who is clearly animated by a love for the dead hero. When Philoctetes learns that Achilles, then Ajax, are dead, his sorrow is that of a man whose own kind have vanished from this earth. By this means he gradually becomes for us the last representative of a kind of heroism that once animated the Greek world. A projection of this sort into the past inevitably brings us back to Homer, and so, to Achilles. The circle comes round; the identification is fixed.³ So, too, the hostility between Philoctetes and Odysseus.⁴ The growing closeness of the former with Neoptolemus tends to establish ethical poles, one of which is Achillean heroism.

Heroism in the *Iliad* is shaped by honor and glory. The outward manifestation of this is the *geras* bestowed by the *laoi*. While Achilles challenges this definition of a hero, the relationship between action, reward, the bestowers and glory remains true throughout the poem, to which the reconciliation in the nineteenth book and the games in the twenty-third bear witness. In the *Philoctetes* the fact of this relationship is implicit in the initial seductive speech of Odysseus to Neoptolemus, in reference to the weapons of Heracles, in connection

² See chapter 4 of my *Iliad, Odyssey and the Epic Tradition* (Garden City 1966) for a fuller exposition of this idea, especially 117 ff.

³ Cf. M. Pohlenz, *Gr. Tragödie I*², 325-35, who notes the Achillean qualities of Philoctetes.

⁴ Cf. B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964) 121.

with the taking of Troy, and elsewhere. Glory, then, attaches itself as a motivational force around Philoctetes and as a theme in his story. Against it the chorus sings of loneliness (e.g., 169 ff. or 676 ff.), which is the denial of Philoctetes' whole being as it has meaning in Homeric terms. From this comes the paradoxical solution that to be saved is to submit, which for Philoctetes is to be doomed. Sophocles begins to play with the possibilities in this hopeless formula early on in the play, for instance, where Odysseus speaks to Neoptolemus, lines 50-53.

But Philoctetes is also ἀνὴρ ὑπόπτῃς (136); this suspicious turn of mind makes him different. Immediately the fact of the wound and the isolation begin to be felt in the play, beginning the telling counterpoint to the Homeric mode which other elements in the play sustain. The force of the wound is often too easily overlooked. Cicero's remarks (*Tusc. Disput.* Book 2) on the regrettable absence of stoicism in Philoctetes' overt suffering reflects a point of view that perhaps often moves one to ignore the wound in criticizing the play. Yet the wound *is* the central fact of Philoctetes' existence, however much Sophocles has muted out direct participation in it. From the start, Sophocles forces the wound upon us, beginning with the Euripides-like reference to the disgusting pus-soaked bandages drying in the sun (38). A noisome wound lodged in so grand a hero is hard to understand; one would imagine that the traditional Greek aversion to disfigurement and mutilation dims the man's heroic lustre. Edmund Wilson's attempt to synthesize the two into inevitable concomitants "...genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together..." is only romantic,⁵ and denies the normal, traditional Greek attitude, the Homeric view, that dominates the play.

To this, loneliness, a constant theme of the play, adds a burden, cruel enough for any human, doubly so for a hero. Sophocles emphasizes this by having the chorus continually remark on the solitude, they who are so many, and so, symbolic of the *laoi*, of society. The choral passage of 676 ff., in calling Philoctetes' plight more dreadful than any other, keeps to the combination of loneliness and the ever-present wound. To be alone with the physical, the animal, the so obviously mortal quality of our being—to have one's *decay* a

⁵ Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow* (Cambridge 1941).

constant companion, without human company (which, because it offers a focus from without, creates some relief from the tortured self)—this is the most leveling of forces. I cannot see that Philoctetes has mastered his wound in a creative way. Has Philoctetes, as Untersteiner tells us,⁶ comprehended "l'assurdo humano e l'assurdo della natura," and agreed to exist in terms of it and with it, these being the central positive and non-morbid acts of the play? Philoctetes is too bitter for that. Essentially the loneliness and the wound together continually break down the normal human defences against our natural existence, deny to Philoctetes the chance to create for himself the heroic world in which he was initially schooled to function, leaving him a desolate figure. The setting and the landscape provide a reflection of this,⁷ a kind of "soul-scape" of Philoctetes, that accounts for the unusual amount of naturalistic description in the play, and transforms the final impassioned farewell to the island into an interior dialogue in the heart of the hero.

As a serious wound makes any man ineffectual, isolation makes a hero ineffectual, and this is symbolized in the reference to the Heracleian weapons which Philoctetes uses for hunting. These weapons, destined for a glorious goal, a gift from one illustrious hero to another, and now so ingloriously employed, are counterpart to Philoctetes' life, which has lost its glorious purpose. The long speech to Neoptolemus (287-316) develops a picture of how very elemental the hero's life has become. The intimate human acts of physical survival have grown to be his central preoccupations. In terms of the traditional ideas of the hero, Philoctetes appears as a figure unrealized.

The arrival of Neoptolemus and Odysseus offers ultimately a chance for the hero to reach some kind of realization. Philoctetes' old comrade-at-arms has changed from the Homeric conception: where Odysseus was once the object of the noble Achilles' mild contempt for his intellectualizing and verbosity, here his relentless striving for solutions has transformed him into something far more unattractive. W. B. Stanford sees him as almost a villain,⁸ a Sophoclean symbol of

⁶ Mario Untersteiner, *Sofocle* (Firenze 1935) 337 ff.

⁷ Cf. H. L. Musurillo, S. J., *Symbol and Myth in Ancient Poetry* (New York 1961) 78-79.

⁸ W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford 1954) 108-11.

late fifth-century corruption. As the intellectually corrupt, he would nicely balance the physically corrupt. Certainly his opening speeches display an Odysseus who is cold and unfeeling. Odysseus' irony and sarcasm, however, reveal the kind of man who understands the human being, who can work for mankind, but who has no feeling for the individual human. He has no sympathy for Philoctetes, although he shows how very well he understands the man's situation. Because he seems to concentrate on recovering the weapons and to ignore the man who wields them, one reads him again as mechanical and inhuman.

But, after this has been said, is Odysseus all bad? We might recollect that in Dio Chrysostom's comparison of the Aeschylean, Euripidean and Sophoclean versions of this story, the Odysseus of Sophocles is said to be "gentler and more straight-forward than in Euripides' *Philoctetes*" (52.16). This observation should remind us that we are not dealing with a Euripidean stock portrayal of Autolycean villainy. Too, it has been noticed⁹ that in the *Philoctetes*, unlike in the other great ethical tragedies, the unsympathetic character makes no attempt to argue the justice of his cause. Here we ought, I think, to take ourselves away from speculations of right and wrong and rather to consider these conflicts in the action as inherent in the nature of things. Odysseus is working for the success of the Greek army. From the beginning that has been his goal.¹⁰ Odysseus reminds us (72-73) that he has been deeply involved from the beginning in the history of the war, as if almost to say that destiny and history have indeed brought him to this moment. Odysseus is on the side of destiny, of Zeus, and of Heracles (cf. 989-90), as is often stressed. He seems to ignore the man for the weapons, but he is no villain. Mechanical and unattractive, he is objectionable, but not to be condemned.

As an example of Homeric heroism, Odysseus will not fit, as indeed he was suspect in the epics as well. In the *Philoctetes* he at times seems to symbolize the interests of the group.¹¹ It seems a cruelty to be sure to practice the deceit on Philoctetes, but to what extent does the

⁹ L. Pearson, *Popular Greek Ethics* (Stanford 1963) 178-79.

¹⁰ R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles, The Plays and Fragments, Part IV, The Philoctetes* (Cambridge 1908) in a note on line 109 remarks that τὸ σωθῆναι is the success of the Greeks at Troy, not Odysseus' salvation.

¹¹ The theory of Untersteiner (note 6) of a Sophoclean antithesis of Polis vs. Individual best fits this play. Cf. A. M. Dale's review, *CR* 50 (1936) 68-69.

cruelty reside in the play, and to what extent is it the projection of the modern conscience? The chorus cheerfully lie to Philoctetes. Where is the evil here? Where in this world and how shall we weigh on justice's scales the interests of individuals and those of the group? Sophocles moves right into the moral ambiguity of the action, keeping it well-defined and ever-present. For example, Neoptolemus' objections to cunning in 86-95 seem confusing and ironic. He remarks that neither he nor his father were born to work evil, he is willing to take Philoctetes by force ("can a one-legged man be a match for us?"), he would rather fail when doing something evil than succeed. What exactly is the distinction, one wonders, when the man is to be seized unwilling in the end. Is not Odysseus' answer (96-99) a morally sensible alternative to Neoptolemus' thinking? Words, as one grows older (or, one could conceive this to mean, as generations pass) prove to be, when crises come, more powerful and effective.

The tarnish to Odysseus' character comes largely from juxtaposition with Neoptolemus; the manner in which he initially defends himself to the younger man (79 ff.) and his hesitation show him to be somehow wrong. We may again remark that introducing Neoptolemus into the play was a brilliant stroke. Odysseus and Philoctetes are far apart in their thinking, in their values; and, reasonably enough, in their private emotions they are hopelessly opposed. Any confrontation between the two would collapse immediately into the rigid nothingness of the two poles which only the preciousness of Euripidean rhetoric could salvage. But between these two extremes we find Neoptolemus; his position is capable of movement—first he supports Odysseus and finally he turns to the side of Philoctetes. In his character we may perhaps see the larger issues collide, for he alone really considers the two extremes, and reacts to them.

Neoptolemus, whose most distinct quality is perhaps youth,¹² seems to be a new age's reaction to epic individualism. This is the mentality of the *polis*. Throughout the play he remains convinced that Philoctetes should return to Troy, both because it will benefit the Greeks, and because Philoctetes' well-being, spiritually and physically, cannot be achieved apart from society. He is in agreement with a social structure larger than that which the heroic age admitted.

¹² Note the continual use of *τέκνον* or *παῖ* in addresses to Neoptolemus.

Neoptolemus understands that the war is to be won, the interests of the state served, and that personal heroism cannot hold center stage. This is the new thought which has left Philoctetes far behind and would have done the same to Achilles. More importantly, however, Neoptolemus is not always completely *sure* of himself, witness again to Sophocles' insistence upon the utter complexity of existence.

That Neoptolemus seems often a pawn, now of Odysseus, now of Philoctetes, engenders suspense over whether he will or will not act; in turn the focus is thus cast on the heroic commitment to action. A hero not in action is not a hero, the dilemma of Philoctetes' existence; for Neoptolemus in the earlier portions of the play, the very definition of his heroism is at stake—a kind of Iliadic Telemachia. Conceived in terms of this problem, the appeals to Neoptolemus from both sides are addressed to his nobility—the key words are *gennaïos* and *physis*.¹³ His parentage makes Neoptolemus an easy symbol of Homeric heroism. He, like Philoctetes, however, is different. Young, unsure, and responsive, he cannot find enough motivation finally in a simple Homeric vision.

The young man's first anguished cry (38) at the sight of Philoctetes' drying bandages shows a sensitivity that will not let Odysseus' plans automatically succeed. The choral description of the young man (137–43) reinforces this feeling. This possessor of princely power has no *real* need to be directed by Odysseus. Odysseus has approached him, however, with a dreadful seduction. Glory will be the prize, although the way to winning it is confused and tortuous.

"You must be noble," says Odysseus, "you must be prepared to help (50–53)." The noble man to lie, one asks, or the hero to serve? But glory is the prize: "There are two rewards to this (116) . . . you will be called clever and you will be called good (119)." For this Neoptolemus agrees to pay the price: "I'll do it and drop off all my feelings of shame (120)." Starkly and brutally Neoptolemus moves away from the background of the Homeric epic.

The sophistries and compromises which Neoptolemus has accepted (especially 83–84) seem suddenly still bleaker. A hundred lines beyond the chorus sings of Philoctetes' miserable lot, of his wound,

¹³ For their use as theme words in this play, see G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 242–43.

and, most importantly, of their pity (170) for him; which leads them to sing of the chanciness of human existence. Certainly it is this pessimistic recognition of man's feebleness and seeming inconsequence before the universe that often generates the warming and ennobling passion of pity. Here Sophocles begins to invest the ugly situation with a healing germ. Neoptolemus, however, replies to the chorus (191-200) that Philoctetes' plight is God's plan, destiny. The callousness of youth dismisses lightly the awful fact of Philoctetes, buttressing the dubious ethic of the mission by relying on the *destined* aspect of the situation. The chorus, by contrast, unwilling to yield to destiny's denial of the human being, has penetrated immediately to the humanity of the situation. One of the crucial problems of the action now emerges, namely, whether Neoptolemus will be moved by the emotion of pity in the presence of man's animal suffering, or whether the heroic formulae, the two-dimensional aspect of Homeric static patterns will prevail—or, in other words, can Philoctetes' agony impinge on the nobility of Achilles' heir?¹⁴ The suspense of the ethical drama parallels that of the mechanical plans for the deceit and abduction of Philoctetes. Because they are at cross purposes, their inevitable conflict creates a suspense of its own.

The drama, then, is to be played out on several levels. As symbols, the characters present the conflict of the hero or individual and society, which bestows all, and which alone creates the hero—Philoctetes arrayed against Odysseus, the Atreidae and even a sympathetic but determined chorus. As Whitman says,¹⁵ "Philoctetes, in refusing the world and the war, is defending his standards of honor, but he is throwing away the real and eternal thing for which he, and every hero, lives." Neoptolemus, as younger adherent to the Greek cause, is symbolically the younger generation, *polis*-oriented and intellectualizing, standing in opposition to the older Homeric individualistic ethic based on right instinct. As the son of Achilles, as a young man who is *gennaïos*, he presents the enduring qualities of nobility that still manifest themselves in the new age. He is never opposed, however, to the

¹⁴ Cf. G. E. Lessing, *Laocoön*, ch.4, sec.4: "Had Philoctetes been master of his suffering Neoptolemus would have persevered in his deceit. Philoctetes, deprived by pain of all power of dissimulation . . . by his naturalness, recalls Neoptolemus to nature."

¹⁵ C. H. Whitman, *Sophocles* (Cambridge [USA] 1957) 182.

ultimate plan of bringing Philoctetes to Troy in the interests of the Greek army. He stands with the community. As human participants in a personal drama of character, the three central figures present a variety of concerns, centering on the tragic dilemma of an individual's claims on the men around him. Odysseus, like any intellectual faced with the choice of an abstraction (here, the success of the Greek army) as an alternative, would deny them altogether. Philoctetes, having been forced by his wound to an extraordinary awareness of self which his solitary nature has naturally enhanced, must insist upon the individual's claims to the point of sacrificing himself and his fellow men; whereas Neoptolemus begins, out of youth and self-love (which intimations of glory so often induce), as selfish as Philoctetes, and arrives at an anguished awareness of how much another can command him ethically. The action proceeds to the corruption of Neoptolemus and the redemption of Philoctetes. Neither movement has issue, happily,¹⁶ in the former instance, tragically, in the latter.

The action moves three ways: from loneliness and isolation on the part of Philoctetes to social commitment (which is never realized); from weak, egoless, directed, valueless fictionalizing on the part of Neoptolemus to a real awareness of self and values through action; and, perhaps most interesting, the visible creation of a noble figure in Neoptolemus by Philoctetes' insistence on such a conception, by Philoctetes' projection of such a figure; in other words, the creation of heroic values by a reaffirmation of the heroic world.

The crisis in the play begins with the arrival of the merchant. The details of the prophecy are explained;¹⁷ the oracle's attention to *persuading* Philoctetes heightens the intensity of the moment, for the potential of doing just that has grown as Neoptolemus' friendship for the older man increased, as a kind of mellowness began to invest the stage, softening the older man's bitter, suspicious nature. So the relationship of the old and young man comes to be changed. Neoptolemus' sudden hesitation over the winds at 638 ff. stems from this

¹⁶ "The play is a comedy in the sense that wickedness is punished and virtue triumphs," H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (New York 1956) 137.

¹⁷ Apparent ambiguities of the oracle have drawn too much attention. As A. J. A. Waldock, *Sophocles the Dramatist* (Cambridge 1951) 200, remarks: "dramatists do not tuck away meanings." Jebb (note 10) xxvi f. has sufficiently resolved the question of the oracle.

change. He now does not want to leave because no clear solution presents itself; there will be no persuasive force in his friendship with Philoctetes, for it is actually *no* relationship, being based on completely false premises. Neoptolemus is left empty—the fiction of aggrievance that he has created for Philoctetes, these moral protestations against the army command have given to him a sensible appraisal of Philoctetes' maltreatment, but without action or committed feeling this remains only a shell.

The impasse is resolved by Philoctetes' sudden attack of coma. The heroics are stripped away, the human being in his sheer frailty and disease appears. Philoctetes, when once again conscious, interprets Neoptolemus' continued presence to his innate goodness (874 ff.), and proceeds to place his complete physical reliance upon the boy. Ironically the qualities that the younger man called into being to create a relationship with Philoctetes now are called forth again. Philoctetes has just assumed a nobility in Neoptolemus, and the younger man must yield to the personality which both he and Philoctetes have created for him and to the ethics of the tradition behind it. For this reason he cannot betray Philoctetes. And then he must in fact go beyond this to serve the very insistent individualism of the old hero, who grows crabbed and withdrawn as he learns of the young man's deceit. Philoctetes' crackling bitterness now is completely natural and sensible; yet his failure to act generously toward Neoptolemus, his intransigence in the face of gentle, yielding good will, suggests a sourness, the rigidity of an older code, out of place in a new world. For Neoptolemus the sight of Philoctetes in pain has produced pity and an understanding of the integrity of the individual. The wound, then, remains a central fact in the play, as well as the pity it creates.

When Odysseus at 1054 suggests that they will leave Philoctetes on Lemnos and depart for Troy with the weapons, we can recognize—after all the discussion of the oracle and of persuasion—that here is the cruellest *πειθώ*. Odysseus is proceeding recklessly to find at last some way to lure Philoctetes; he is being forced in every way, for some issue to the event must be found. As the chorus proceeds to make clear (1083 ff.), the action is destined, Odysseus is acting as destiny's agent as Philoctetes is its victim. One cannot rail at fate or alter it (note how carefully Odysseus keeps Philoctetes from killing himself [1003]).

While events with brutal, inexorable force move to a position before which everyone must be resigned, Neoptolemus, the handsome, the gallant, brave young man does at least attempt to fight this fate.

Has Neoptolemus justice on his side, as he believes (1251)? He certainly has patience in trying to make amends to Philoctetes (1267 ff.); he has reason and fairness in staying Philoctetes' hand (1300 ff.); and he shows great understanding (1314 ff.). Neoptolemus urges Philoctetes to go to Troy so that he will heal his wound, that symbol of the bitterness in Philoctetes' soul, symbol of his blemished soul (isolated, mean, and un-heroic). The younger man looks to the singular individual reason for Philoctetes' return, not the heroic. He has, however, no special justice in his position.

Nor has Philoctetes justice in denying the young man and in choosing to remain withdrawn from man (1368 ff.). The play is intelligently indecisive from the start, perhaps—superficially at least—by virtue of having three delineated personalities interacting where none is villain. Philoctetes' pessimistic speech of 446–52 containing the bitter remark “nothing bad ever dies” is actually never challenged in the play, not even by the promises extended by Heracles (1421 ff.), which come in an atmosphere of futility and bitterness, delivered in an arbitrary way common to the final moments of ancient theater. Perhaps the empty center of this play is filled by the spectacle of the *growing* relationship between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. Love is an evolving and growing thing in this play (unusual in extant tragedy is the appearance of something *developing* on the stage). Yet the play exhibits a void.

The *deus ex machina*, in the person of Heracles, seems indeed to underscore the dilemma and the futility in this story.¹⁸ Sophocles seems to have allowed his drama to progress to the point where all the inherent conflicts in the relationships lay clear, alive and in force; and because every aspect of the play has some significance for the story, the conflicts are more than ever vital and manifold. Having reached this point he then imposes an arbitrary ending. Heracles stops every forward thrust of the story, save the will of Odysseus. But we are

¹⁸ On the paradox of Philoctetes' position see Knox (note 4) 138–39; on the fundamental absurdity of Heracles' speech see Kitto (note 16) 104 f., 130 ff.; on the *deus ex machina* as an arbitrary solution to the solutionless play see Pearson (note 9), 198 f. and I. M. Linforth, *Philoctetes the Play and the Man* (UCPCP 15, no. 3) 152–54.

returned to the essential conflicts which began the drama, because the course of action, partly through the changing allegiances of Neoptolemus, has moved us completely to a position sympathetic to Philoctetes. That he is wrong is true; that he must go to Troy is also true, but the drama has not resolved any of this, nor do Heracles' staccato directions. The action is left in collision, as certainly it should be, and the sense of collision, the hopelessness, the dilemma, are reinforced by this final stage technique.