

The Athenian Asklepieion and the End of the *Philoctetes**

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SUMMARY: Despite the setting of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* on the isolated, barren island of Lemnos, far from anything resembling a *polis*, many different scholars have concluded that this work has something to do, however elusive it might ultimately be, with the nature of the Athenian *polis* late in the Peloponnesian War. My contribution to clarifying this relationship will be to reexamine the text's discourse of healing and cure in the light of the associations between disease, social strife and the cult of Asclepius, the figure who, according to Heracles at the end of the drama, will finally cure Philoctetes, and whose temple had recently been constructed next to the Theater of Dionysus as a result of the plague during the 420s. Sophocles' vision of social healing stresses the need to reintegrate the aristocratic mode into society, as part of a fundamentally democratic concern for the mixed or balanced polity. The engagement of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* with the Athenian cults of Athena, Heracles and Asclepius and with the topography of the Acropolis provides the key to this interpretation.

ONE OF THE CENTRAL PARADOXES OF SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES*, and of the efforts of modern interpreters to understand it, is the opposition between the

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drama's setting on the isolated, barren island of Lemnos, far from anything resembling a *polis*, and the pervasive consensus among a very diverse group of scholars that this work has something to do, however elusive it might ultimately be, with the nature of the Athenian *polis* at the end of the fifth century B.C.E.¹ My contribution to clarifying this relationship will be to reexamine the text's discourse of healing and cure in the light of the associations between disease, social strife and the cult of Asclepius, the figure who, according to Heracles at the end of the drama, will finally cure Philoctetes. Sophocles' vision of social healing reverses the Euripidean equation of the expulsion or destruction of the aristocratic hero, seen in such dramas as the *Hippolytus*, *Heracles* and *Phoenissae*, to stress the need to reintegrate the aristocratic mode into society, as part of a fundamentally democratic concern for the mixed or balanced polity.² The engagement of Sophoclean drama with the Athenian cults of Athena, Heracles and Asclepius and with the topography of the Acropolis provides the key to this interpretation.

Contrary to tradition, at the end of Sophocles' drama the god Heracles promises Philoctetes (1437–38) that he will send Asclepius to Troy in order to heal him, but what could Philoctetes' *nosos* and the promise of an Asclepian cure mean for an Athenian sitting in the Theater of Dionysus in 409 B.C.E.?³ Because, in 409, the year of the production of the *Philoctetes*, it had been two years since Alcibiades' recall and Athens still continued in turmoil, the homology between the returns of the outcast hero of the Trojan War and of the controversial Athenian aristocrat has seemed an inviting target for many of the drama's investigators, even as the scholarly terrain moved away from searching for correspondence between dramatic and historical personage and toward a more general consideration of drama as an expression of polis ideology.⁴ Hunting for Alcibiades has always been quite popular, though Jameson also suggested the younger Pericles for Neoptolemus, and Calder

¹ This recurs throughout such different works as Jameson 1956, Calder 1971, Segal 1981, Greengard, Vickers, and Rose.

² See Connor 1984: 228–29, who discusses Thucydides Book 8 and proposal of a mixed constitution; n35 lists Euripides frag. TGF (2) 21 as a source for metaphor, and cites its medical origin. See also de Romilly. The present paper is part of a larger study of the interplay between medical language, religion and politics in tragic drama after the great plague of Athens, to be published by Cambridge University Press.

³ I examine in detail below the traditional versions of the healing of Philoctetes.

⁴ The survey in Bowie of the problem of the relationship between Athenian history and the *Philoctetes* is informative and very even-handed. For the relationship between the ideology of the *polis* and Athenian drama, see Connor 1989 and 1996, Goldhill 1990 and 2000, Rhodes, and Seaford 1994 and 2000.

even links Philoctetes with Sophocles himself. Rose's analysis of Sophistic influences on the drama correctly returned the discussion to considering the larger historical and cultural resonances of the drama's discourse (Jameson 1956, Vickers, Calder 1971, Rose). I argue for a different kind of topicality for the play through the invocation of Asclepius by Heracles at the end of the drama. More recently, Stephens reemphasized the importance of remembering "the stark realities of the audience's and Sophocles's recent and current experiences" (156). The construction of the Asklepieion figured prominently in this reality.

LEMNOS AND ATHENS

Few Greek tragedies—save, perhaps, the *Hecuba* and *Prometheus Bound*—take such care to divorce their acting from the city and civilization as does the *Philoctetes*, though the *Hecuba* at least manages to engage problems inherent in Athens's conduct during the Peloponnesian War. While the schemes of Odysseus to return Philoctetes and his bow to the desperate Achaean army have been seen to represent the goals of the community, as opposed to the individualistic hero Philoctetes, even that community is distant (Beye).

One of the major changes Sophocles made to the Philoctetes myth, as handed down to him by Aeschylus and Euripides, was to empty the island of Lemnos of its inhabitants, completely isolating from any aspect of society the hero Philoctetes, dumped there by the Greeks on the way to Troy because of the disturbances to their community from his wound; the extent of the depopulation of Lemnos becomes very evident when one considers that in the versions by the other two major tragedians the Chorus itself is composed of Lemnians, and not, as with Sophocles, sailors who serve under Neoptolemus.⁵

Sophocles drives this isolation home in the opening lines of the play, which feature a tone-setting description of the island by Odysseus (1–2):⁶

ἀκτὴ μὲν ἦδε τῆς περιρρύτου χθονὸς
Λήμνου, βροτοῖς ἄστιπτος οὐδ' οἰκουμένη,

This is the shore of the sea-girt land of
Lemnos, untrodden by mortals and uninhabited

The dominant concern with the isolated nature of the island becomes even more apparent if one compares it to other Sophoclean openings such as the *Ajax*, which plunges us into Athena's rough urging of Odysseus to find Ajax,

⁵ See Jebb's discussions in his introduction xxx–xxxi and the notes to verses 2 and 302.

⁶ All translations of Greek passages are my own.

or the *Antigone*, which opens by immediately spelling out the cause of the heroine's distress. These dramas thus establish immediately their concerns with the relationship between heroes and their communities. In other words, in the *Philoctetes* Sophocles seems to have gone out of his way to move the drama's action out of the realm of the concerns of the *polis*, stressing instead the absence of any form of collective. This separation is especially apparent in the play's language, where words such as *erêmos*, "desolate," echo thematically through the drama.⁷ On the other hand, after Odysseus's evocation of Athena Polias, "Athena of the City," at 134 (an evocation to which I shall devote more attention later), words denoting civic collectives such as *astu* are completely absent and *polis* itself occurs only four other times: the first instance (386) features a gnomic utterance by Neoptolemus on the dependence of an army and a city on its leaders, which even Jebb has conceded might be a reference to the revolution of the 400 in 411 B.C.E. In the second case, Philoctetes laments being *apolis*, "cityless" (1018), and later, when the now bowless Philoctetes contemplates suicide he cries ὦ πόλις, ὦ πατρία (1213 "O city, O fatherland"). Finally, Heracles, appearing as a deity above the cave of Philoctetes, gives his orders to his former protégé that he should travel to the city of Troy (1423–24):

ἐλθὼν δὲ σὺν τῷδ' ἀνδρὶ πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν
πόλισμα, πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσει λυγρᾶς,

You, by going with this man to the Trojan
city, you will first cease from this terrible disease

In the first straightforward reference to a city in the play, Heracles links Philoctetes' return to a *polis* to his healing, a linkage stressed by the quadruple alliteration of labial consonants in πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν πόλισμα, πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσει. The separation of Philoctetes from any city is both the effect of his wound and a symptom of the disease. His stubborn refusal to rejoin the army, reveals, according to Neoptolemus, the conquest of his social nature by the island's savagery (1321–23). Thus, paradoxically, the complete removal of the action from the city actually sharpens the focus on the *polis* and its discontents. Stripped of the complexities of *polis* life, its most elemental aspects become readily apparent. And, perhaps even more paradoxically, by removing the drama from any contact with a *polis*, Sophocles can gently refocus his audience on the one *polis* in view: Athens itself. In other words,

⁷ *Erêmos* appears at 228, 265, 269, 471, 487, 1018. See Segal 1981: 296, also citing Jones.

while the *Philoctetes* abounds in topical references to Lemnos, it lies open, to paraphrase Taplin's 1987 study, to "remapping."

Thus, I shall contend that, while the scene is a rocky shore on Lemnos, the play is "set" in Athens and the drama accomplishes this maneuver because of the widespread connections between Lemnos and Athens during the fifth century. Such a double setting has precedent in Sophocles in his *Oedipus Tyrannus*, which is "full of expressions, emphases and references which [suggest] an Athenian rather than a Theban setting" (Knox 140). Sophocles deploys a similar tactic in the *Philoctetes*. Lemnos itself appears to have been a particularly Athenian part of the Empire.⁸ Athenians were the first Greeks to possess the island; an Athenian force led by Miltiades first occupied Lemnos around 500 B.C.E. and the colonists who then inhabited Lemnos never ceased thinking of themselves as culturally Athenian (Parker 1994: 343; Hdt. 6.137–40). Pausanias records (1.28.2) that on the Athenian Acropolis there was a statue of Athena by Phidias, "the best worth seeing of the works of Phidias, the statue of Athena called Lemnian after those who dedicated it." Members of the audience of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* had reasons to think of this particular statue and the relationship between Athens and Lemnos while they watched this drama and heard Odysseus's evocation of a recognizably Athenian Athena. Lemnos is thus part of the equation that suggests Athens.

SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES* AND ATHENIAN CULTS

The first textual key in recognizing the drama's concern with Athens lies in the evocation by Odysseus of Athena Polias. In the drama's opening scene, Odysseus rapidly and skillfully explains to his young comrade Neoptolemus the specific method, deceit, needed to capture Philoctetes and his bow. Departing the scene with the explanation of a final fail-safe to back up the planned treachery, Odysseus closes the prologue with a prayer to the gods before the Chorus enters (133–34):

Ἑρμῆς δ' ὁ πέμπων δόλιος ἡγήσασαίτο νῶν,
Νίκη τ' Ἀθάνᾳ Πολιάς, ἥ σῶζει μ' ἀεί.

May Hermes the escorting deceiver lead us
and Victory, Athena Polias, who saves me always.

⁸ Sophocles would have become personally acquainted with the close bond between Lemnos and Athens when he served as a general during the Samian War; Thucydides (1.115.3–4) records how the Athenian leaders took aristocratic hostages from Samos and lodged them in Lemnos after establishing a democracy in Samos, but the Samian rebels stole the hostages back.

Why does Odysseus turn to Hermes and Athena? On the one hand, it makes perfect sense for Odysseus, at this hour of need, to pray to the two deities who help him the most, the trickster god of travelers and the warrior goddess of wisdom, but the presence of Athena Polias, Athena of the City, is another matter.⁹ In her appearance in the earlier drama, *Ajax*, Athena had played a role thematically appropriate to Homer's *Odyssey* as the protector of the hero and the enforcer of human limits, and the guardian of the army's leaders; the last word of Odysseus's prologue speech, *aei*, might even nod at the same first word in *Ajax*, which Athena herself utters.

It is very unclear, however, what Athena might have to do with the *Philoctetes* as Athena Polias. Athena of the City, one might ask, what city? How can Odysseus evoke a City Goddess when there is no city? The first part of the prayer to Athena, in her cult guise as Athena Nike, makes perfect sense, for Odysseus clearly and naturally desires victory in this expedition and in the Trojan War, but completing the reference to Athena as Polias warrants further study. While the evocation of Athena Polias in this cityless play is in itself remarkable, it becomes even more so when one considers that Athena never appears under this designation elsewhere in extant Greek tragedy—admittedly, a smaller than ideal corpus for forming such judgements securely. The only time in tragic drama that Athena receives her cult designation as protector of the city is when there is no city. A strange coincidence is that the sole instance where Aristophanic comedy mentions Athena Polias is in another drama from the same era (and where Alcibiades is also thought to lurk in the background), the *Birds*, where there is no city—or, perhaps more accurately, where the city is in the process of being founded, for this reference occurs when Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, having begun their founding of Cloudcuckooland, wonder which god should serve as protector of their city (*Birds* 828). That Euelpides first suggests Athena Polias shows the title's instantly recognizable function in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens.¹⁰

I shall now briefly explore the nature of the cult of Athena in Athens, for this foundation will help explain the prominence of Athena Polias at the end of the *Philoctetes*' prologue and, ultimately, its relation to the surprise ending of this drama. The *Philoctetes*, in fact, brings together various facets of the

⁹ Calder 1971: 169 insists this line is an interpolation, on the grounds that Athena would never consort with an Odysseus of this nature. Rose 309n77 argues against Calder compellingly.

¹⁰ In the *Birds* the mention of Athena Polias could also signal that the two comic heroes are beginning their unintended recreation of all they are trying to escape before it even starts!

worship of Athena in Athens, especially those that were important late in the fifth century. Despite the modern perception of the greater centrality of Athena Parthenos in Athens, the ancient evidence, as Herington has shown, clearly indicates that “in the fifth century Athena Polias was the goddess of Athens *par excellence*” (26).¹¹ The adjective *polias*, Herington also observes, “originally meant ‘she who dwells on the polis,’ the old-fashioned name for the Acropolis.” Athena Polias also was associated with two major structures on the Acropolis. First, the principal treasures of Athens, which were held in the Parthenon, belonged to Athena Polias. Second, Athena Polias was the name of the ancient wooden effigy in the Erechtheum, described by Pausanias (1.26.6). Given that the Erechtheum’s construction was alluded to in a number of Athenian dramas (Calder 1969; Loraux 37–71 and 172; Sourvinou-Inwood 25–31), the evocation of Athena Polias in the *Philoctetes* may well have been a further acknowledgment of this building’s centrality in Athenian thought. Citing an inscription from 409/08, Herington (23) proposed that the wooden statue of Athena Polias had been moved to the Erechtheum that year, the very time of the production of the *Philoctetes*. Moreover, Pausanias adds as one of his first visual details of this area a few sections later (1.27.1): “In the temple of Athena Polias is a wooden Hermes, said to have been dedicated by Cecrops.” Images of Hermes and Athena, two gods naturally associated with Odysseus as wise trickster figures, are clustered close together on the Acropolis and in Odysseus’s speech, thus suggesting that an evocation here of Athena Polias in the Erechtheum could remind the audience also of Hermes, and, as I shall observe below, Hermes, after Odysseus prays to him at the end of the prologue, creeps back in at the end of the *Philoctetes*, this time in association with Philoctetes himself. The combined reference to the two gods’ effigies would of course strengthen the local flavor of the drama’s setting.

Suggesting a topical, even a generally Athenian, reference to Athena Polias runs my argument afoul of the considerable wisdom of Jebb’s commentary on the *Philoctetes*, so some consideration of his contrary opinion on these lines is required. Jebb 31 rightly noted on these lines that cults of Athena Nike and Athena Polias were spread elsewhere in the Greek world, so the references here to them are “not exclusively Athenian... Sophocles, though writing for the Athenians, is not making purely local allusions.” But Jebb is often reluctant to see in Greek drama anything other than timeless, universal truths, and

¹¹ On the development of the worship of Athena in the fifth century, see Garland, Chapter 5. Ridgway notes the challenges to parts of Herington’s thesis that have been subsequently mounted, but these do not seem to affect his argument as it pertains to mine.

he strives here to minimize the possible Athenian relevance of these words. Jebb thus, while writing of the early attempts to link the play to the problem of Alcibiades, asserts, "Now, to suppose that Sophocles intended a political allegory of this kind, is surely to wrong him grievously as a poet" (xli). While Jebb thus posits a vision of the poet rising above the messy fray of his time, he then concedes in the next sentence, "At the same time it must be recognized that the coincidence of date really is remarkable" (xli). And as I have already shown, Jebb seems perfectly comfortable with a Sophocles who can, as a poet, allude to the revolution of the 400 at line 385, and, in his commentary on the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he allows Sophocles to allude to the two temples of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis. So Jebb's own inconsistency suggests there is more than one way to look at lines 133–34 of the *Philoctetes*, and the specifically Athenian nature of the references to Athena there are bolstered by the cult activities around the time of the production of this drama on the Acropolis. These are not "purely local allusions," but neither are they strictly universal. Athena Polias, as Herington stressed, simply was the dominant form of Athena in Athens and indelibly part of Athenian self-consciousness in the fifth century, so a creation and performance of a drama by an Athenian in Athens at a time of crisis merits attention, particularly when a prominent character prays to "Athena Polias, who always saves me" (134). Odysseus uses Athena Polias to stress that his actions benefit not himself but the greater good (whether he is credible is another matter), and in turn he implies that salvation lies in the devotion to that common good.

Two further aspects of the worship of Athena on the Acropolis seem relevant to the concerns of the *Philoctetes*: the nonmilitary nature of the cult of Athena Polias and the additional cult of Athena Hygieia. Odysseus first evokes Athena Nike (Athena Victory) before turning to Athena Polias, but the underlying concepts of the two cults are not necessarily similar or compatible. Herington (44) points out that the attributes of Athena as she was worshipped in the Parthenon and in the Erechtheum can be sharply distinguished, since, while in the latter sanctuary she was a peaceful goddess, depicted as unarmed and likely overseeing the fertility of the Attic land, in the former she was clearly more a warrior goddess, with Phidias's famous statue showing her in full battle array.¹² Here again events on the Acropolis seem to coincide with the language of this passage in the *Philoctetes*, for the famous carved parapet of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis was constructed around 410 B.C.E. Of course, the presence of the winged goddess Nike in the hand of the monumental statue of Athena Parthenos by Phidias adds to the martial

¹² On the appearance of Athena Polias see further Ridgway.

nature of this Athena. Moreover, a number of architectural elements in the Temple of Athena Nike and the Erechtheum (the Temple of Athena Polias, as Ridgway dubs it) correspond, suggesting further interconnections between the two figures as represented and worshipped on the Acropolis (Ridgway 137). Odysseus thus briefly encompasses the two opposite yet complementary aspects of Athena as she was worshipped on the Acropolis in Athens, though the order of his words stresses Athena Polias, for it is she who “always saves me.” Devotion to Athena Polias, the peaceful Athena who guards the fundamental well-being of the *polis*, provides salvation for the hero, and, by extension, for the city as a whole.¹³

This concern with finding safety in Athena connects further with another aspect of the worship of Athena on the Athenian Acropolis that also pertains to the key theme of disease in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*. The cult of Athena Hygieia (Athena Health) was the most prominent healing sanctuary on the Acropolis before the arrival of Asclepius after the plague (Garland 132; Parker 1996: 175). In a sense, the ascription of healing powers to Athena seems a bit out of place, and peculiarly local to Athenian religion, but may have simply arisen from her older fertility function in Attica. At no point in extant fifth-century poetry is she evoked thus and therefore she remains a somewhat murky figure. A later text, Plutarch’s *Pericles*, records an anecdote about Athena Hygieia of typically Plutarchian charm and potential questionability (*Per.* 34.7–9). During the construction of the Propylaea one of the workmen fell from very high and was near death, and, as a result, “Pericles was much cast down at this, but the goddess appeared to him in a dream and prescribed a course of treatment for him to use, so that he speedily and easily healed the man. It was in commemoration of this that he set up the bronze statue of Athena Hygieia on the Acropolis near the altar of that goddess, which was there before, as they say.” Pliny repeats the identical story (*NH* 22.44), which, combined with the chronology of construction and the location of the extant base, supports Plutarch’s account. This dream is likely an aetiological story to account for Pericles’ construction of a statue to Athena Hygieia on the Acropolis (Ehrenberg 94n2), but there is not very much information beyond that story, and her cult appears to have been the main victim of Asclepius’s popular arrival during the Peace of Nicias, since there are no extant dedications to

¹³ Rose 309 argues that the epithet Polias “implies broadly the supports of organized political life but also strongly suggests contemporary democratic Athens.” Jameson 1956: 227n51 in turn asks: “Is it mere coincidence that these three gods, Hermes, Athena Polias, Athena Nike, whose moneys, controlled by the Treasurers of the Goddess, played an important part in Athens’ war finances?”

Athena Hygieia dating later than 420. She does seem to have some kind of prominence in the 420s, after the great plague, since the monument to her was located next to the Propylaea and dates after 432, with an inscription that is thought to have been written in the early 420s (Ridgway 137). Thus, a surge in interest in Athena Hygieia could have prepared the ground for the arrival of Asclepius. A further connection with Asclepius is that this cult title functions also as the name of Asclepius's daughter, who came to be worshipped prominently herself. Pausanias records that on the Acropolis there were two statues named Hygieia, Asclepius's daughter and Athena Hygieia (1.23.4). Elsewhere, Pausanias reports that at Tegea a statue of Athena is flanked by images of Hygieia and Asclepius (8.47.1). In Athens, the significance of the proximity of Athena Hygieia, Asclepius, and his daughter would have been further enriched by the snakes that were attributes of both deities, nor should one forget here that this was the very animal that wounded Philoctetes.¹⁴ The *Oedipus Tyrannus* offers a further, albeit more indirect, connection between Asclepius and Athena as healers. In the first strophe of the first stasimon, the Chorus, desperately praying to the gods to save their city from plague, initially calls upon Apollo (the father of Asclepius) as "Delian Healer" (154 Δάλιε Παιάν), before praying in the antistrophe to the trio Athena, Artemis and Apollo (158–62) as *aleximoroi*, "averters of death."¹⁵

Clearly, given the shared names and functions, there was a deeper relationship between Athena and Asclepius, but recognizing the full implications of this association requires a reconceptualization of the civic nature of the Asclepius cult on the Acropolis. We tend to think of health as an individual concern, yet for the densely populated *polis*, especially Athens during the plague years of the Peloponnesian War, it was a problem for the community as a whole on the literal level, and health quickly became a symbol for the general well-being of the body politic (Krug 120). Thus, Parker suggests, "Athena Hygieia's role was essentially prophylactic, and directed to the health of the community as a whole, not of individuals" (1996: 175). Sophocles' drama thus begins with the evocation of deity in a specifically Athenian form and explicitly linked by Odysseus to his personal safety, a goddess who had until a mere decade before been prominently conceived as the primary deity overseeing the communal health of Athens, a function unlikely to have been completely forgotten because of the arrival of the figure of Asclepius, a figure evoked at the end of the *Philoctetes*. These two healing deities thus provide a significant frame for the intervening action, and it is to the relationship between frame and action

¹⁴ Greengard links the snakes in the Asclepius cult and the *Philoctetes*. On snakes and healing see Kearns 16.

¹⁵ This divine triad is repeated, without the epithet, at OC 1090–95.

that I turn after considering another significant element of the relationship between the *Philoctetes* and the Athenian Acropolis.

ASCLEPIUS AND ASKLEPIEION: REMAAPPING THE ACTION OF THE *PHILOCTETES*

As scholars have begun to work out the particularly Athenian nature of tragic drama and the importance of recognizing the “embeddedness” of this literature on the Acropolis, increased attention has come to the interplay between the topography of the drama’s setting and the topography of the Acropolis. David Wiles has shown the need to include consideration of the performative space of the Theater of Dionysus when we try to determine the meaning and function of drama in fifth-century Athens.¹⁶ The Asklepieion, constructed during the decade before the production of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, was located at the northwest corner of the Theater of Dionysus (Aleshire; Garland 116–135; Parker 1996: 177–81), and just as the temple ruins wrought by the Persians during their invasion in 480 and 479 would have produced a powerful political effect on the theater audience who looked over their shoulders during the performance of Aeschylus’s *Persians* in 472 (Cartledge 19),¹⁷ so too would the new shrine to the healing deity, imported from Epidaurus during the Peace of Nicias (Mikalson 220), have meaningfully interacted with dramas where disease functioned as a metaphor. The introduction of Asclepius at the end of the *Philoctetes* is thus important as it reconfigured, at its first production, the performative space as Athenian rather than Lemnian.

A subtle network of references to Asclepius that has run throughout the text’s center suddenly becomes prominent with the unexpected epiphany of Heracles at its end, but the epiphany, and the introduction of Asclepius, while unexpected, still come as a consequence of careful preparation by Sophocles in the drama’s themes and language. Heracles himself was worshipped as *Alexikakos* (avorter of evils), a healing deity, and was strongly associated with Asclepius.¹⁸ In building on the earlier themes of illness and cure, Heracles reminds the audience that the illness of Philoctetes extends beyond his physical

¹⁶ See also Cartledge. Wiles has an Athenocentric perspective, and one must allow that such dramas were quickly staged with success in other *poleis*, but my concern is the production of the *Philoctetes* in 409, in Athens.

¹⁷ Cartledge also speculates about the impact of the Erechtheum on performances in the Theater of Dionysus.

¹⁸ On Heracles as *Alexikakos* see Kearns 14–15, and Parker 1996: 175 and 186. Greengard 7 and 91 elucidates the importance of the Heracles cult in Athens for the end of *Philoctetes*, which Greengard 7 shows was “similarly referential to and empowered by an external reality: in this case, the audience’s predictable response to invocation of the religious cult of Heracles by the playwright.”

body to his social relationship with the world. Heracles' speech twice links healing to Philoctetes' presence at the city of Troy (1423–24).

ἐλθὼν δὲ σὺν τῷδ' ἀνδρὶ πρὸς τὸ Τρωικὸν
πόλισμα, πρῶτον μὲν νόσου παύσει λυγρᾶς

Going with this man to the Trojan
city, first you will cease from this baneful disease

Throughout the drama, Philoctetes' wound has been cast in language that links it to his uncivilized existence, so Heracles seems almost to imply that the main step in healing Philoctetes is the reentry itself into civilization.¹⁹ The shift in the adjective describing the illness, from "savage" (*agria*) to the somewhat milder "baneful" (*lugras*) initiates this process; contact with the divinized Heracles immediately ameliorates savagery. After further describing the future heroic exploits of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, Heracles returns to an explanation of how Philoctetes will be physically healed that strongly echoes 1423–24 in its content, labial alliterations and the repetition of a form of *pauein* (1437–38):

ἐγὼ δ' Ἀσκληπιὸν
παυστήρα πέμψω σῆς νόσου πρὸς Ἴλιον.

And I shall send Asclepius to Troy to stop your disease.

The sudden appearance of Heracles at this point in the action is matched in its unexpectedness by the announcement that Asclepius will be the healer.

The naming of Asclepius here is yet another way in which Sophocles in the *Philoctetes* either threatens to alter traditional myth, or actually does so, and while the threat to send Philoctetes and Neoptolemus home is the most obvious potential breach, the unprecedented inclusion of Asclepius is neither insignificant nor unrelated to the rest of this drama, nor even to Athenian drama in general during the last quarter of the fifth century.²⁰ The first fragment of Proclus's summary of the *Little Iliad* reports that in that narrative Philoctetes is healed by Machaon, whom Homer's *Iliad* identifies as the son of Asclepius (11.613–14). The Catalogue of the Ships further has Machaon

¹⁹ E.g. 173, 266. Neoptolemus's angry pleas to Philoctetes (1321–35) bring to fulfillment these associations between Philoctetes's social isolation and his wound. See Segal 1981: 300–15.

²⁰ Scholars have paid surprisingly little attention to the presence of Asclepius in Heracles' speech. Winnington-Ingram 1980: 302 merely notes the "inconsistency" of who will do the healing. The two important articles by Deborah Roberts (1988 and 1989) on the ending of the *Philoctetes* say nothing about the subject, while Greengard 91–93 at least recognizes than more is happening in these lines than scholars have generally allowed.

joined by his brother Podalirius as the two sons of Asclepius at Troy (*Il.* 2.731). Neoptolemus, castigating Philoctetes for his stubbornness and trying to persuade him to come to Troy of his own free will, promises him healing by “the sons of Asclepius” (1333–34), who he knows are at Troy, thus following the epic tradition. Since Neoptolemus now has completely shown his hand to all the players, this promise cannot be part of the set of mysteries and evasions that otherwise dog interpreters of this drama. Despite Sophocles’ divergences from previous versions of the myth in other parts of the drama, such as the substitution of Neoptolemus for Diomedes and the presentation of Lemnos as a desert island, Neoptolemus and Sophocles are here following and re-affirming the script handed to them from the epic tradition, and they lead the audience to expect the drama’s ending will stay true to form; thus, Heracles’ words startle the son of Achilles as well.²¹ What Heracles offers comes as a surprise, but not, upon closer reexamination of the previous parts of the drama, as a complete one.

First, given the divine cause of Philoctetes’ wound and its specific origin with a snake, combined with precedent in dramatic versions of episodes from the Epic Cycle of a wound healed by the wounder, it seems appropriate that Asclepius, whose most prominent symbol was his serpent, be the healer of Philoctetes.²² But another deity mentioned earlier in the *Philoctetes*, Athena,

²¹ Jebb xxxi conjectures that in Sophocles’ lost *Philoctetes at Troy* “Asclepius was introduced as aiding the skill of his sons.” Jebb posits *Philoctetes at Troy* was the earlier play and thus compares allusion to the *Antigone* at the end of the later *Oedipus at Colonos*. Jebb, however, does not account for the relationship between the traditional healing cited by Neoptolemus and the new version offered by Heracles. See Jebb on 1437 for the difference between the knowledge held by Neoptolemus and Heracles.

²² A snake will be involved in both the attack on Philoctetes and his cure, so further suggesting the logic of Asclepius’s presence in the *Philoctetes* is the precedent of the Telephus legend on the Athenian stage, especially Euripides’ *Telephus*, produced in 438 as part of the group that included the *Alcestis*. The *Telephus* likely told how Telephus, who had been earlier wounded by Achilles, now is needed by the Greek army to help them reach Troy. An oracle which indicated that he could be cured by his wounder leads him to barter with the Greeks. While much is unknown about this drama, we do know that in it Odysseus persuades Achilles to heal Telephus. While this drama was produced almost thirty years before *Philoctetes*, it seems to have stuck in the Athenian theatrical memory, as, in 425. Aristophanes plays off of it in one of his most brilliant parodies of Euripides in the *Acharnians*, where Aristophanes takes Euripides to task, as he repeats in the *Frogs*, for dressing heroes in rags. The scenario of the rag-clad and wounded hero thus opens and closes the Trojan War. Note also that at *Acharnians* 423 Euripides offers Dikaiopolis the costume of Philoctetes, which Dikaiopolis rejects as insufficiently wretched before adopting Telephus for his persona. Presumably Aristophanes here is thinking of Euripides’ own *Philoctetes* from 431. On Euripides’ *Telephus* see Webster 43–48 and Heath.

certainly had, as a result of her chthonic origins, strong associations with snakes, as seen frequently in Greek art, with the foremost example being the huge snake coiled at her legs in Phidias's monumental statue in the Parthenon. Because of the First Hypothesis and scholia on lines 194 and 1326 that identify Chryse with Athena, and the somewhat ill-defined nature of Chryse herself, one has cause to wonder whether Sophocles wants his audience to think of Athena here.²³ The First Hypothesis begins with the assertion that Philoctetes received his wound at the altar of Athena on an island that is also called Chryse.²⁴ While Jebb's notes on line 1327 dismiss any full identification of Chryse with Athena, "yet," Jebb concedes, "the associations of the Erechtheum have suggested the word οἰκουρῶν. The sacred serpent in that temple—representative of Erichthonius and guardian of Athena Polias—was regularly called οἰκουρὸς ὄφις."²⁵ It is possible that the later Alexandrian author of the Hypothesis was influenced by such fifth-century language that so strongly points to the worship of Athena in Athens. Chryse is not Athena, yet Sophocles can exploit overlaps between the two as part of the redirection of the drama to Asclepius and Athens; the goddess is Chryse, but she is also, in a sense meaningful to the Athenian audience, Athena. As I discussed earlier, the full meaning of Odysseus's prayer to Athena Polias depends on the audience's awareness of the recent completion of the Erechtheum and the nature of Athena Polias as a principal deity of Athens. As I shall argue below, evocations of Athena and Asclepius as saviors in a specifically Athenian context frame the action of the *Philoctetes*. Just as Asclepius supplanted Athena Hygieia on the Acropolis, so too he succeeds her in the drama. Thus, as a deity and a serpent wounded Philoctetes, so will a deity and a serpent heal Philoctetes. With the broader context of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* thus established, I shall now look again at how Sophocles prepares his audience for Asclepius inside the drama.

²³ The First Hypothesis begins: "Only the son of Poias, who once had been Heracles' companion, knew the location of the altar of Athena at Chryse, where the Achaeans had to make sacrifice. While seeking this to reveal it to the fleet, he was struck by a snake, and left, ailing, on Lemnos." On Chryse see Segal 1981: 308–12. Jebb xl and the note on 1327 discusses briefly the scholia. Segal 1995: 110 notes how careful Philoctetes is to avoid speaking ill of, let alone cursing, the divinity that caused the wound.

²⁴ The Second Hypothesis omits mention of both Athena and Chryse.

²⁵ Jebb cites the entry in Hesychius for οἰκουρὸν ὄφιν, as well as Aristophanes, *Lys.* 758 and Hdt. 8.41.

POETRY AND PERFORMANCE

Language, poetic form and performative context set the stage for the arrival of Asclepius. First, Sophocles carefully prepares his audience for the introduction of Asclepius at the end of the drama by beginning the first *kommos* with a hymn to sleep (Hypnos), after Philoctetes has collapsed in pain and handed the bow over to Neoptolemus (827–32).

Ὕπν' ὀδύνας ἀδαής, Ὕπνε δ' ἀλγέων,
εὐαὲς ἡμῖν ἔλθοις,
εὐαίων εὐαίων, ὦναξ·
ὄμμασι δ' ἀντίσχοις
τάνδ' αἴγλαν ἃ τέταται τανῦν.
ἴθι ἴθι μοι παιών.

Sleep, who knows no pain, Sleep, who knows no anguish,
come in favor to us,
come happy, and giving happiness, my lord!
Keep before his eyes such light of healing
as is spread before them now.
Come, come to me Healer!

Haldane (54) has shown how the invocation ἴθι ἴθι μοι παιών (“Come, come to me Healer”) is intended to recall the paean song, and that the hymn as a whole should be read in light of Sophocles’ association with the Asclepius cult.²⁶ While Haldane’s analysis of the generic aspects of this hymn remains pertinent and compelling, her references to Asclepius warrant redirection, as Haldane neither includes the immediate proximity of the Asklepieion to the Theater of Dionysus nor links the Hymn to the role of Asclepius at the drama’s close. But the tradition of the role of Sophocles in the introduction of the cult of Asclepius to Athens is at best questionable (Lefkowitz 84),²⁷ so to understand more fully this paean’s role in the *Philoctetes* one needs to look again at the text as a whole and the topography of the Acropolis. Haldane offers the suggestion that “the short hymn must at every point have recalled

²⁶ Rutherford 110 observes that the noun αἴγλαν is especially associated with Asclepius.

²⁷ For skepticism about Sophocles’ role in the Asclepius cult, see now Garland 125, Parker 1996: 184–85, and Connolly. Lloyd 85 resurrects the connection, though without indicating it had been mortally wounded. Connolly 2 allows that there is sound evidence for Sophocles’ composition of a paean to Asclepius, but also argues, “that the reception was of a supernatural, not a cultic nature, that the story of the reception is probably biographical invention inspired by the paean.”

to Sophocles' audience the liturgy of the new cult of Asclepius" (56), but it is worth asking why Sophocles would care to remind his audience at this juncture of the drama. I thus submit that Sophocles is setting his audience up for the change in the traditional healer of Philoctetes at the drama's end and continuing to direct his public to think about the significance of the religious topography of the Acropolis, especially since he has thus here already evoked the Asklepieion (827–32). I shall set aside the role of the topography for a moment in order to discuss further how the poetic structure of the drama prepares the way for Asclepius.

Second, Sophocles uses meter in addition to genre to redirect his audience, as Heracles speaks in anapests that disrupt the marching trochaics of what had appeared to be the exit of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus from the stage. Neoptolemus has decided to honor his pledge to protect Philoctetes and take him home in a move that surely astonished the audience that took their roles in the sack of Troy as part of the unchanging and unchangeable parts of the Troy saga; such radical revisions, or threats to do so, the audience typically expected from Euripides, but not so much from Sophocles. But Sophocles has yet another surprise ready, Heracles, whom Sophocles had sent off to be divinized at the end of the *Trachiniae*. And, as with the *Trachiniae*, Sophocles signals these unusual and momentous events with adroit exploitations of the possibilities of poetic meter. The abrupt shift from trochaics to the anapests in the apparent, though false, ending makes the entrance of Heracles as startling to the audience as it is to Philoctetes and his comrade. Meredith Hoppin has shown that the anapests in the final scene create a divine aura around Heracles, shift the discourse from the human to the divine plane in a religious ritual, and "break dramatic illusion and rupture the dramatic frame" (160).²⁸ The anapests remind the audience that it is watching a theatrical event and distance its members from the action they are watching. Hoppin shows how the power of the change to anapests then shifts the action to a higher mimetic reality so that the "second" ending has more authority and power than the first: "once the second ending is underway it is even more integral to the play's structure than the first ending was" (161).²⁹

The abruptness of Heracles' entrance and its consequent disruptive effect are strongly linked to Philoctetes' first attempt to leave at 538 and the subsequent attack of pain and sleep that prevents it, events that were marked by

²⁸ Hoppin develops broader ideas on anapests from Brown.

²⁹ Hoppin continues and buttresses the modern trend in criticism of seeing the ending as integral to the preceding action, as opposed to being merely ironic or gratuitous. For a survey of this controversy see Easterling 1978: 32–39. The controversy has continued beyond the publication of Easterling's article, though its basic terms have not changed.

the first oblique introduction of Asclepius, as we have already seen, through the Hymn to Sleep. In the structure of the *Philoctetes* the divinity of Heracles' epiphany balances the god-sent assault of Philoctetes' *nosos*, since the paroxysm prefaces one mirror-scene (893–96) and the epiphany succeeds the other (1402) (Hoppin 162; Taplin 1971: 27–29). Hoppin further shows the thematic links between paroxysm and epiphany, yet somehow misses the way Heracles' introduction of Asclepius as Philoctetes' healer completes the distant evocation of the son of Apollo in the Hymn to Sleep. Moreover, the Chorus closes its ode just before the attack of pain on Philoctetes with an evocation of the divinization of Heracles on Mt. Oeta (726–29), which, of course, points forward to the end of the drama. What has been a prayer for temporary respite from pain in the Hymn to Sleep, a remote hope that some permanent cure might be found, finds final fruition in the promise of Asclepius in the last scene. The introduction of Asclepius thus is inextricably linked with the center of the drama, and Sophocles makes the change in the identity of the healer of Philoctetes, who had been announced by Neoptolemus at 1333–34, a necessary component of the plot.

The anapests momentarily disrupt, and then shift, the audience's attention, while the content of Heracles' speech binds the scene to what had preceded it, but the disruption could also redirect the audience to the real religious life of Athens around them. In tragedy the anapestic meter can indicate the accession to the realm of the gods and trigger the audience's renewed awareness of its presence at a production in the theater. Hoppin concludes:

For those spectators who choose to participate fully in the second ending, its anapests have indeed fulfilled both functions. They have acknowledged that the play's action is a substitute operating at one remove, but they have decided to accept the action as the real event. They will believe in the god's intervention since, as at all religious rites, only the god's presence can make the rite effective. (173)

But there is more than one god intervening here, indirectly, though significantly, and that additional god, in an important sense, is present. If indeed the new anapests do momentarily distance the audience, making it newly aware of watching a mimetic enactment while binding it anew to the moment's religiosity, then the audience, while hearing the content of those anapestic lines, would be more likely to be aware of the relationship between Heracles' promise to Philoctetes and the topography of the south slope of the Acropolis that surrounds the Theater of Dionysus.

When Heracles promises Philoctetes that Asclepius will come to Troy to heal the suffering hero's wound, Sophocles makes a special direct appeal to

the surroundings of the Theater of Dionysus that, aside from references to the god Dionysus, is without parallel in Athenian tragic drama. Sophocles shifts the identity of the healer from tradition in order to take advantage of the adjacency of the Asklepieion. The topography of the south slope of the Acropolis plays a significant role in the end of the *Philoctetes* by engaging the dynamics of social and personal healing to extend that healing through the acting area, into the audience and beyond. Disease imagery and paean songs in Euripides' *Heracles* and *Phoenissae*, produced within the five years before the *Philoctetes*, are meaningfully related to the construction of the Asklepieion at the northwest edge of the *theatron* of the Theater of Dionysus;³⁰ in other words the relationship of the *Philoctetes* to its environment is not unique, but its awareness of that relationship is. Perched above the *skênê*, Heracles commands the acting area, looking out over the other two actors and Chorus, to the spectators and above them.³¹ With the audience's attention newly engaged by his unexpected appearance and directed by the anapests that accompanied it, Heracles, I propose, points over the audience's heads to the new home of the god Asclepius himself, a gesture that, in keeping with the effect of the anapests, momentarily ruptures the dramatic illusion, yet at the same time, draws the city of Athens into the Theater of Dionysus as part of the meaning of the drama. While actors certainly could make plenty of unscripted gestures, the topography of the south slope of the Acropolis and its relationship to the themes of this drama motivate a gesture by Heracles towards the Asklepieion.

My proposal here finds support in the direction of the exit of Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. Oliver Taplin has shown that Sophocles in the *Philoctetes* does not use one of the two *eisodoi* flanking the orchestra, "while loading the other with unprecedentedly complex and shifting meaning" (1987: 72).³² Taplin does not elaborate his claims for symbolic complexity, but I suspect full realization of this requires thinking about the *eisodoi* in relation to the topography of the south slope of the Acropolis. David Wiles (153–54), following Taplin's lead, has in fact sketched out the symbolism of the entrances, with the left (audience's left and true east) unused entrance representing nature—where Philoctetes hunts and gathers food—and the active (right

³⁰ I examine these matters in my forthcoming book.

³¹ Mastronarde 283 places Heracles either on the roof of the *skênê* or "perhaps" on the crane. Wiles 181 sees "no reason" why Heracles should not be on the roof. Given the attention paid to the nature of Philoctetes's cave as represented by the *skênê*, placing Heracles above it while he ends Philoctetes's domicile there would be both thematically and theatrically appropriate.

³² Taplin does not specify which of the two *eisodoi* remains unused.

and west) entrance representing the path to the bay, and thus civilization and culture.³³ Wiles argues convincingly that this drama's physical dynamic is consistent with this normal left-right paradigm, and he cites the reference by Neoptolemus to the rising of the sun in support. Neoptolemus, trying to convince Philoctetes to leave the island with him, reminds his suffering friend that he will never be healed (1330–31) “while the sun which rises here sets there.” “The ‘here’ of Lemnos,” argues Wiles, “seems to be defined by the actor’s gesture as east, whilst Chryse, Troy and elsewhere are defined as west” (154). If we assume that Sophocles uses the real orientation of the Theater, it is clear that Neoptolemus points first to the east and then to the west, consecutively in two different directions, thus anticipating the significant deictic gesture of Heracles. Both gestures rely on the physical reality around the audience and both involve the healing of Philoctetes. The exit then binds the gestures of Neoptolemus and Heracles further together, as Neoptolemus and Philoctetes exit together to the right, to the west, and towards the Athenian Asklepieion. The movement that comes as a consequence of Heracles’ instructions in a sense reverses them as those instructions are enacted by the actors, for, essentially, Heracles does not just send Asclepius to Philoctetes in Troy, but he also dispatches Philoctetes to Asclepius in Athens. Moreover, the gestures of Neoptolemus are immediately preceded by his reference (1327–28) to Chryse, who, I noted earlier, should evoke (though not necessarily be equated with) Athena, and Chryse’s “roofless shrine,” protected by a guardian snake, traditionally associated with the snake in the Erechtheum, the temple of Athena Polias.

This localization of the drama’s reference balances, and perhaps thus helps explain, the curious evocation of Athena Polias by Odysseus that I discussed earlier. The Chorus itself might strengthen this connection because, as it exits the orchestra, chanting again in anapests, it prays to the Nymphs of the sea to be “saviors of homecoming.” The noun *sôtêras* clearly echoes the verb *sôzei*, in the prayer of Odysseus to Athena Polias (134), “who always saves me.”³⁴ Already Philoctetes had unknowingly almost quoted and thus appropriated Odysseus’s words in his own description of the fire in his cave, which “always saves me” (ὃ καὶ σῶζει μὲν ἄεί, 297). While Odysseus has achieved his goal, the larger concern of safety or salvation has shifted from the schemes of an

³³ Wiles 153–54. Wiles shows how this polarity is paradigmatic in the staging of tragedy in the Athenian Theater of Dionysus. Wiles’ stress on polarities has not been universally accepted; see Revermann.

³⁴ The theme of salvation in the drama has been discussed from varying angles by Avery, Jameson 1956 and Rose.

amoral manipulator to Philoctetes and, finally, to the community as a whole, as represented by the chorus of sailors, a collective of potentially great resonance for the Athenian audience, many of whom had served in the army, if not navy itself.³⁵ Words thus echo from beginning to end, binding the parts of the drama together, as do the evocations of the Athenian Acropolis, and they do so in yet another way as well. In his farewell speech to the landscape of Lemnos, Philoctetes hails (1459–60) “the mountain of Hermes which echoed in response to my groaning while I was suffering.”³⁶ The name of Hermes, Athena’s companion in the Erechtheum, thus appears for the second time in the drama, moving from Odysseus to Philoctetes, and no longer simply as a trickster god evoked by Odysseus as an escort in his mission of deception; Hermes, in a sense, provided companionship to Philoctetes as much as to Odysseus and the god is now drawn into the happier, more inclusive vision of the world made possible by the promise of healing.

SOPHOCLES’ *PHILOCTETES* AND THE ATHENS OF 409 B.C.E.

The dramatic space of the *Philoctetes*, thus remapped, raises new questions. What does this mean for the audience members who sit in the Theater of Dionysus at Athens in 409 B.C.E.? Since Sophocles gives such an intense sense of the place of Lemnos, why would he then also point his audience towards their own city? As I have already shown, it certainly was not unprecedented for Sophocles, nor for Euripides (Mitchell-Boyask 1999: 49–59), to engage in a double setting for a drama’s action, placing it in a city other than Athens, while constructing a clearly Athenian framework through references to Athenian landmarks and institutions. This move allows the poet to universalize the action’s significance while still keeping the audience aware that the drama is pertinent to the audience’s immediate concerns. Sophocles’ emptying Lemnos of its inhabitants, working against the tradition of a normally populated island carried on by Aeschylus and Euripides, marks that depopulation as significant. The irony of the natural setting of this drama is that it makes much more visible, and thus highlights, any reference to Athenian life and its problems.

³⁵ The specific identity of the Chorus as sailors has been disputed. Kosak 121 succinctly summarizes the arguments for and against, concluding that the Chorus members are in fact sailors.

³⁶ The mountain of Hermes also forms part of the network of fire stations in Clytemnestra’s “Beacon Speech” (Ag. 283), and thus seems to have been a famous landmark.

Sophocles can also exploit the physical nature of the *theatron* to unite his audience with the characters and their concerns. David Wiles has shown how the open *theatron* and immediacy of the acting area to the spectators incorporated the audience into the spatial field of the performance.³⁷ When actors address any group or the larger world, the audience becomes part of that community. Similarly, the *theatron* can be associated with a mountainous slope, such as Mt. Cithaeron, so important to Dionysus, or, as is the case at present, Mt. Oeta, or even the mountain of Hermes called upon by Philoctetes at the end. Starting with the example of Mt. Cithaeron in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Wiles observes:

The performance interpellates the slope of the Acropolis as much as the citizen body seated on it. On Philoctetes' lonely island of Lemnos, where there can be no public assembly, Mount Oeta across the sea seems in the same way to be associated with the *theatron*. Philoctetes gazes across the sea at the community from which he has been severed, and Heracles gazes at the site of his apotheosis. (215)³⁸

I have already demonstrated a certain permeability between dramatic setting and performance space operative in the semantics of the *Philoctetes*, so I can now consider a reversal of the identity of that distanced community and the hero's relationship to it. The audience can become inhabitants of Philoctetes' home city, but it can also associate itself with the Chorus of sailors who accompany Neoptolemus. An inanimate mountain cannot reciprocate the pangs of separation, but a collection of human beings can. Alienation from community has had its corollary in Philoctetes' wound that has made him savage, and on that urban slope where Philoctetes gazes is the temple of the god whom Heracles will send to Philoctetes as he becomes re-socialized and thus healed at Troy. The *theatron* thus marks both the separation of Philoctetes from home and community and the means of his healing and reintegration. Philoctetes can be saved by something, in a sense, visible to him, and visible to the audience. His troubles are over.

The troubles of the audience, on the other hand, are another matter. One of the primary crises afflicting Athens in the years immediately preceding production of the *Philoctetes* was the role of Alcibiades in the government of Athens and in the conduct of the Peloponnesian War, with the recall of Alcibiades in 411 so tantalizingly evocative of the Greek army's need for Philoctetes at Troy. Attempts by scholars since Lebeau in 1770 to match Alcibiades with

³⁷ Wiles, especially Chapter 10, "*Orchestra and Theatron*."

³⁸ Wiles does not mention Hermes' mountain.

one or several characters in Sophocles' drama have proved inconclusive or unsatisfactory.³⁹ While one can never be certain how Sophocles wants his audience to think of Alcibiades when watching the *Philoctetes*, it does seem fairly safe to say that the question of Alcibiades and the strife within Athens energize the thematic concerns of the *Philoctetes*, and the drama itself feeds back into the civic discourse on the stability of the *polis*. As Bowie argues, "particular historical events are made homologous with mythical stories in such a way that the action of the dramas provides various models for viewing the events" (61).

One of the models operative here, I think, is the social drama of expulsion (and its opposite) to ensure communal health and stability. Sophocles reverses the Euripidean equation of the expulsion of the hero to heal the sick city, producing a drama wherein, instead, the community only finds salvation by reincorporating the previously expelled hero. The Euripidean formula was characteristic of democratic Athenian ideology; the city cannot be stable in the presence of the aristocratic hero.⁴⁰ Sophocles, at least in his earlier surviving dramas such as the *Ajax*, the *Trachiniae*, and the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, had depicted the annihilation of the heroes whose very success as individuals had endangered the community. Their danger was figured as a disease, a *nosos*, which must be purged from the body politic, but Sophocles, late in his career, felt impelled to enact dramas such as the *Philoctetes* and the *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which heroes were reintegrated into their societies, thus enabling cures for both themselves and their communities. Thus, one might ask with justification whether Sophocles in the *Philoctetes* is offering a rather "undemocratic" cure for the ills of Athens.⁴¹ I do not think a simply reversible equation works here, for several reasons. Given the pervasiveness of the metaphor of the sick city and hero in Euripidean drama, Sophocles' almost total isolation of references to illness to the figure of Philoctetes alone becomes quite remarkable.⁴² Sophocles makes it quite clear that the Greek

³⁹ Jameson 1956, Calder 1971, Vickers. Bowie 56–61 judiciously surveys the question.

⁴⁰ See Seaford 1993 and 1994. I examine the "Euripidean formula" in my forthcoming book. On the importance of exile and expulsion to the Athenian imagination, see now Forsdyke 2005.

⁴¹ Rose subtly explores the relationship between Sophistic beliefs and democratic ideology, concluding that the *Philoctetes* ultimately advocates a renewed aristocratic ethos. It is impossible to think about this drama and contemporary politics without Rose's work, but it will quickly become clear that I think there are other ways to look at the relationship between the *Philoctetes* and the Athenian *polis*.

⁴² For example, the *Iphigenia at Tauris* several times speaks of the "sick house" (680, 693, 930); in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* all Hellas ails (411); and in the *Andromache*, the house

army is in dire need, that its leaders are at best driven by questionable motives and use less than admirable methods, but Sophocles refrains from any direct link between the *nosos* in Philoctetes and one in the body politic. In the face of the pervasive Euripidean exploitation of this metaphor, its absence here seems a deliberate, or at least motivated, choice by Sophocles who appears interested here in another permutation of the relationship between the sick hero and the community.

Expulsion as solution remains the effective pattern throughout the drama, until Heracles makes Philoctetes' re-inclusion possible. We are never given a reason to doubt the claims of Odysseus that Philoctetes had disrupted the sacrifices, rituals and battle plans of the army; Philoctetes had introduced disorder to his community.⁴³ The harsh speech of Neoptolemus after persuasion to leave for Troy begins to fail stresses that Philoctetes violated—willingly or not—a sanctuary of the gods (1326–28) and that the wildness produced by his disease makes him incapable of engaging in productive verbal interaction even with those who seek to be his friend.⁴⁴ Exclusion extends even to the thinking of the excluded, for, in the central scene when the full violent attack of pain strikes Philoctetes, he begs Neoptolemus to cut off the wounded foot with his sword (an instrument Philoctetes himself lacks, 747–49). Later, when deprived of his bow he again begs, this time the Chorus, for an amputation (1200–09). Had he the means, Philoctetes would do to his own body part what Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus did to him. Philoctetes' language in these two moments does not resemble the way characters speak of his exile, which is dominated by forms of ἐκβάλλειν, “to throw out” (255, 1034, 1390–91), while at 747–49 and 1249 he uses verbs for cutting and striking. However, at 1201, Philoctetes speaks of “driving off” (ἀπώσαι) his foot, a verb Sophocles deploys elsewhere for exile (*OT* 641, 670), as does Herodotus (1.173). Since Sophocles frequently personifies the wound on Philoctetes' foot (e.g. βρύχομαι, 745), he thus prepares an extension of the image of the wound as a separate being in the form of an exile. But the amputation does not occur; Philoctetes cannot drive away from his body his own limb. This could be Sophocles' way of signaling that the body of Philoctetes is a metaphor for the entire Greek army.

is again sick (548, 950) and all Hellas once more suffers a disease (1044). The image of the sick city is developed most extensively in the *Phoenissae* (e.g. 867, 1014) and the *Heracles* (e.g. 34, 272–73, 541–43). Sophocles does use this image at *Ant.* 1015, while at *OT* 22–30 the city is wasting away (*phthinousa*, 25–26), but is not said directly to have a *nosos*.

⁴³ The reasoning behind the expulsion of Philoctetes is not in doubt, but the cowardly way in which it was carried out remains morally reprehensible by Greek standards as well as ours.

⁴⁴ Worman shows how Philoctetes' disease affects discourse in the drama.

If the inseparable foot of Philoctetes stands for his relationship to the army, then his reincorporation into it seems inevitable, and his exile, while long, only temporary; in other words, he was essentially ostracized, not banished. While the discourse of pollution and purgation suggests that Philoctetes served as a kind of ritual *pharmakos* figure,⁴⁵ his exile does evoke more effectively also the political, democratic institution of ostracism. Evoking ostracism in a discussion of a drama produced in 409 B.C.E. runs against the fact that Athens had not used it since the ostracism of Hyperbolus in 415 and never would again, but six years is not enough time for such a significant institution to have disappeared from the active cultural memory and social narrative patterns of the Athenians.⁴⁶ But one must write of ostracism in 409 with great caution, at the very least. It would be foolish to imply that the army expelled Philoctetes because he became superior in virtue or power and thus a threat to their democracy, as typifies the victim of ostracism, but the temporary nature of his exclusion and his successful return to society suggest ostracism more than scapegoating. Moreover, the duration of Philoctetes' exile, approximately ten years, suggests several important models of exile in myth and history.⁴⁷ Plutarch reports that Solon, while in his prime, asked the Athenians for a ten-year leave of absence (*Sol.* 25.6), while the second exile of the tyrant Pisistratus lasted a decade. Homer, of course, shows how Odysseus spent ten years in a form of exile after the Trojan War before returning home to Ithaca, a better king for his experience than had he returned directly home. If Philoctetes was in fact intended to evoke Alcibiades or any other exiled aristocrat, it is important to remember that, as Forsdyke argues, exile through ostracism helped legitimize democratic rule through moderation (Forsdyke 2000 and 2005). Again, one can hardly call the treatment of Philoctetes "moderate" (though he was expelled, not killed), yet drama, myth and history seem to engage here in a complex network whose parts shape and reshape one another. It is also important to remember that Philoctetes leaves Lemnos of his own free will, joyously journeying to Troy under the instructions of Heracles, to become a functioning member of heroic society again. Exile, which had threatened to permanently ensavage Philoctetes, has in its end brought him to a new understanding of his place in the world that had been impossible

⁴⁵ Worman 17 invokes this loaded term, but does not elaborate much on its implications.

⁴⁶ Ostwald 1955: 110 observes that there was no ostracism after Hyperbolus because of "the temporary and makeshift nature of the reforms by which the Athenian democracy was modified" after the disaster of the Sicilian Expedition.

⁴⁷ Mirhady 17 suggests the "aetiological function of mythology" for ostracism, but does not mention Philoctetes.

for his Sophoclean predecessors such as Ajax. A few years later, of course, Sophocles would return the ruined Oedipus from a different kind of exile in the *Oedipus at Colonos*. An Athenian watching these dramas might see in them the resonance of his own city's institutions, wherein ostracism had previously been used moderately in support of the democratic regime.

The *Philoctetes* projects a reborn political body of the army that incorporates the harsh lessons Philoctetes and Neoptolemus have learned, while still inclusive of the able, if amoral, Odysseus. Although, as Rose (328) has demonstrated, Sophocles' drama seems to restore aristocratic prerogatives through a reaffirmation of the principle of inherited excellence,⁴⁸ the *Philoctetes* presents currents in its language, dissenting from aristocratic values, that are grounded in the principles of Athenian democracy. In other words, the Sophistic resonances in the language and tactics of Odysseus, and the renewed stress on inherited excellence, are not necessarily sufficient to turn Sophocles into some kind of fifth-century Neoconservative. On the other hand, the view that Sophocles turned committed democrat after his complicity, even if passive, in the oligarchic coup of the 400 in 411 B.C.E. remains hard to prove conclusively, to say the least.⁴⁹ We have already seen how the *Philoctetes*, through its evocations of Athena Polias and inclusion of the Chorus as soldiers and sailors, participates symbolically in the discourse of Athenian political life, and examining the drama's language anew reveals terminology that is consonant with the democratic concerns of the *polis*.

Health, ultimately, seems linked to freedom in the *Philoctetes*. Before the paroxysm, in the ode that concludes with the allusion to Heracles' divinization, the Chorus laments the suffering of Philoctetes, which it feels is particularly undeserved because Philoctetes was ἴσος ὦν ἴσοις ἀνὴρ (685 a man fair/equal to those who are fair/equal).⁵⁰ As with the adjective *eleutheros* later in

⁴⁸ Segal 1981: 339 also concludes, "*Philoctetes* reflects a mood of declining trust in democracy."

⁴⁹ Calder 1971 presents the *Philoctetes* as a Sophoclean *apologia* for the coup. Such biographical readings do not offer much beyond mere speculation, but Rose 328 is too blankly dismissive of any and all democratic leanings in the text. Jameson 1971 re-examines the passages in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that deal with arguments made by and against Sophocles after the oligarchic revolution and concludes that Sophocles must have prosecuted one of its main leaders, Peisander, after the restoration of the democracy. I find Jameson's argument and evidence convincing, and they show a Sophocles of a much more democratic mind while composing the *Philoctetes*. This article has not circulated as widely as it should have, and it is neither cited nor acknowledged by Rose.

⁵⁰ See Kosak 120–21 on this language as typical of Athenian democracy.

the drama, it is difficult to overlook completely the political connotations of *isos*, which has an especially strong connection with the Athenian notion of citizenship. *Isos* and *isonomia* typically designate political relationships where all have an equal share in power.⁵¹ But Philoctetes' illness and isolation deprive him of equal status, and a way must be found for his reintegration with the army as an equal. He cannot return under compulsion, but must go freely. But to be a "citizen," Philoctetes must be healthy; citizenship requires a cure. This is not the last time health and the language of fifth-century democracy are linked.

In the pivotal scene where Odysseus suddenly appears and violently tries to suppress the incipient hesitation in Neoptolemus over the seizure of the bow, Philoctetes laments his lost freedom (995–96):

οἷμοι τάλαις. ἡμᾶς μὲν ὥς δούλους σαφῶς
πατήρ ἄρ' ἐξέφυσεν οὐδ' ἐλευθέρους.

Ah wretched me. Father clearly sired
me to be a slave, not free.

Philoctetes responds here to Odysseus's insistence, so evocative of the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides, that "these things must be obeyed" (994). Crippled and deprived of his one means of independence, if not survival, Philoctetes has lost his freedom. His *nosos* has effectively stripped him of all status and rights and placed him in the condition of slavery. As Philoctetes begins to speak almost like a democrat, Odysseus responds immediately (997) with the language of aristocracy, that Philoctetes' destiny is to be among "the best" (*tois aristoisin*). Deprived of freedom, Philoctetes believes his only choice is suicide, by throwing himself off the cliff face where he lives, an act Odysseus prevents.

Philoctetes, then, early in his extended denunciation of Odysseus, reiterates the language of freedom but combines it with the discourse of disease (1006): ὦ μηδὲν ὑγιὲς μηδ' ἐλεύθερον φρονῶν. "O you thinking nothing healthy nor free." Jebb notes that "the phrase οὐδὲν ὑγιές was a common one in Attic and is used often by Eur., though never by Aesch., and only here by Soph. (ad loc.)." Disease language does tend to be more predominant in Euripides than in the other two tragedians, but I should also note here that "nothing healthy" cannot be simply cast off here as a dead metaphor and translated as "nothing good," since, in tragedy, it is common only to Euripidean drama, and, moreover, its presence in the mouth of a diseased character in a drama where illness is used

⁵¹ On *isonomia* and the language of democracy, see Vlastos 1947 and 1953, and Ostwald 1969.

as a metaphor extensively cannot be thus minimized. An altered context can allow dead metaphors to be resurrected and inhabit human discourse with new force. And the combination of health and freedom extends the thinking of the previous reference to freedom only a few lines earlier.⁵² As Philoctetes' accusations at 1006 suggest, Odysseus's designs and tactics are a symptom of illness in Odysseus; the *nosos* of Philoctetes is infecting in different ways all those who come in contact with him. At what is, arguably, the absolute emotional climax of the drama, the audience hears the protagonist insist on the importance of freedom after the Chorus has identified him in terms that suggest one of the cardinal principles of Athenian democracy.

If W. R. Connor (1989: 18) is correct in his recent argument that the City Dionysia arose not under the Pisistratids but after the birth of democracy, his claim that "the festival itself was a celebration of freedom"⁵³ rings truer, I think, when we notice the centrality of references to freedom in the *Philoctetes* and other Athenian tragedies. Sophocles does in this drama grapple with profound contemporary problems such as the influence of the Sophists and political instabilities after the oligarchic coup, but it is extremely unclear which "side" he takes here in the struggle between aristocrats and democrats. There is certainly abundant material to see, in Rose's words, an "ideological counteroffensive" that restores the old aristocratic tradition, but the drama stubbornly resists simple formulae about its politics.⁵⁴ The audience in the Theater of Dionysus, especially its western half, sat roughly in between the sanctuaries of Dionysus Eleuthereus and Asclepius. The *Philoctetes* itself equates health with freedom, and the lack of compulsion in Heracles' com-

⁵² Words made from ἐλεύθερ-are not common in Sophocles, with only 20 instances (exclusive of fragments), as compared to 24 in Aeschylus and 59 in Euripides; the frequency per 10,000 words, 3.34 in Sophocles, 4.01 in Euripides, and 5.98 in Aeschylus. In other words, their relative infrequency in Sophocles makes them more marked when they do appear.

⁵³ Connor argues further (23–24) that the theme of freedom in tragedy has not been given due emphasis by scholars. Against Connor's arguments for a Cleisthenic reorganization of the Festival, see Rhodes 106–07, with bibliography, and Sourvinou-Inwood 102–04, who is overconfident, I think, concerning the shape of the orchestra in the Theater of Dionysus. Rhodes's cautions against the overemphasis on democracy, as opposed to the *polis*, in studies of Athenian drama, are salutary. Even if Connor's arguments for a fundamental restructuring of the Dionysia late in the 6th century are wrong, it is not unreasonable to posit an incorporation of liberation as a primary interest of the Dionysia after the advent of democracy in 508.

⁵⁴ Even Rose 326 admits, "Sophokles' ideological counteroffensive is eminently indirect and cautiously circumscribed with what might almost be called escape-clause ambiguities."

mand allows Philoctetes to leave the island with joy at the prospect of being, at last, healed by Asclepius. Odysseus may have been expelled from the stage, almost as a theatrical *pharmakos*,⁵⁵ yet it remains an inalterable part of myth, and thus part of the drama's parameters, that Troy's fall results from his ingenuity. The drama's characters look forward to a healthy mixed polity, projected from the deepest desires of the Athenian audience. As in his final drama, the *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles brings the beneficent powers of the lost, ruined hero to Athens during the darkest, most desperate years of the Peloponnesian War.

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⁵⁵ See Mitchell-Boyask 1996 on theatrical scapegoating.

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