

its way to the startled heart.  
Memory will be powerless to retrieve  
what's lost, yet this crazy  
poise is what we have:  
teetering on the edge,  
thrusting our heads into,  
out of the empty tank,  
insisting on the truth of what is gone.

## Philoctetes

Velocity, one of my students calls you—  
notably a quality you lacked.  
Your virtues were in rootedness. Another  
student says loser (losers get marooned);  
another scumbag, with that pus-drenched foot.  
Your filthy wound offends their pristine senses?

It took a god swung in on a high crane,  
awkwardly booming, to proclaim you free  
to turn tail and escort the mumbling boy  
back, first across a too familiar sea,  
then to the old scene, Troy.

No other power could deflect that pull

of cord strung taut, Odysseus to the child,  
tangled in you, your festering foot, your root  
and rooted tentacle of sour attachment.  
The cliff, cave, trees; the stream; your slice of sky  
loved through the ten ineffable (how not?)  
years: it was to these you said goodbye

when after so much silence you heard language,  
heard Greek again, but put to what vile use.  
Worse than the bow: that they could snatch from you  
and turn against you, but the subtle tongues,  
so many serpents coiling in their nests,  
spitefully hissing plots to bring Troy down,

to bring you back! No; turn your back on them,  
address the hills, the ether, all that's pure  
and utterly ungiving as untaking.  
Sun circled sky, moon rose, week followed week,  
yet dreams (home; vengeance) visited in Greek.  
Ten years you held to emptiness. No more.

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