Poe, Joe Park. Heroism and Divine Justice in Sophocles' Philoctetes. Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca Classica Batava 34. London: E J. Brill, 1974.

How Soph is being critical + subversive, not pious, re human & gods in Phil.

Almost all critics of Sophocles have seen in him, if not an optimist, at least a fulfilled idealist, each of whose plays balances against its grim tragic vision a final assertion of goodness or justice or compensating beauty. Partly this is because of our historical knowledge.[1] We know Sophocles as a man of recorded piety and a good citizen, who served the gods and served the state. Above all we know him as a man of fortune, a success, whose excellence was recognized in his own lifetime. Of such a man one might expect a serene confidence in the ultimate goodness of things. Partly, too, I think, what clearly is in the three Theban plays influences our reading of the other four. Justice in *Antigone* and divine grace in *Oedipus Coloneus* are so manifest; Antigone and Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* are such attractive characters, whose very strength implies a faith in man's worth. It is plain that in these plays we are in the world of high tragedy, which compels us to look up and admire, and, if occasionally we are morally disturbed, to give emotional consent at least to its awesome beauty.

However, the peculiar thing about Sophoclean criticism is that, when it comes to the interpretation of individual plays, there has been so much disagreement about precisely what it is that is good or just or beautiful. Many critics have been tempted to read into Sophocles' plays messages almost Christian in their moral tone. Thus Bowra: "Sophocles allows no doubts, no criticism of the gods. Sometimes indeed they are hard to understand, but none the less men must assume that all is as it ought to be. If divine ways seem wrong, human ignorance is to blame. In the end the gods will be proved right."[2] It is not my purpose here to argue that the "pietists'" view of Sophocles' religious attitude seriously distorts their interpretation of every one of the seven plays. Certainly *Oedipus Coloneus* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* are concerned with

[1] An excellent discussion of our knowledge of Sophocles' life and personality is found in Wolfgang Schadewaldt's article, "Sophokles und das Leid," *Hellas und Hesperien* (Zürich and Stuttgart 1960), 231-47 = *Potsdamer Vorträge* 4 (1947). See also Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, tr. J. Willis and Cornelis de Heer (London 1966), 271-76.

[2] C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1965; repr. of the first edition, 1944), 367. In contradiction to Bowra, G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958), 271, points out that Sophocles allows frequent expressions of doubt and criticism of the gods, as well as assertions of their benignity (see below, p. 36).

religion, and it may be, although I do not think so, that these plays make assertions of the gods' wisdom and benignity. But, whether or not Sophocles' gods are essentially benign, the pietists' interpretations often are thrown out of kilter by their perspective; their need to find at the core of each play a theological question is responsible for the embarrassment, special pleading, and question-begging that is all too common in discussions of the less-frequently-read plays.

In reaction to this it has fairly recently become fashionable to place the emphasis of Sophoclean drama on the hero rather than on the gods. But the reaction has been just that, tending to the opposite pole. It has taken all virtue from the gods and vested it in man. Cedric Whitman, the "hero-worshipers' " leading spokesman, has put it succinctly: "The more we look closely for a satisfying justice in the world, the more inevitably we are driven to disillusion and to the admission that justice is with man, not the gods; that man is more responsible than he dreamed, though in a different way; and that perhaps this very quality in man is a kind of divinity." [3] I believe that Whitman is nearer to the truth than the pietists, inasmuch as Sophocles' bias is humanistic. But again, I question whether a narrowly prescriptive view such as this is sufficient to comprehend Sophocles' ideological variety. Whitman's book, for all that it has helped bring a salutary balance to Sophoclean criticism, can be as Procrustean in its interpretations as Bowra's.

Of course, most critics have taken a middle road, or rather, they are eclectics (Kitto is a good example), finding Sophoclean idealism manifested now primarily in the hero, now in the gods. I believe that eclecticism is right and proper in Sophoclean criticism. There is no monolithic Sophoclean philosophy. But the interesting thing is that everything written about Sophoclean drama finds idealism somewhere. And this search for idealism has tended to obscure distinctions. Even Gordon Kirkwood, whose book on Sophocles is the most balanced and clear-sighted among recent critical studies, can call Deianeira a "great figure" and can talk of the "purity of her devotion to Heracles" as a "devotion to an ideal" which is comparable to Antigone's highmindedness.[4] Now, however appealing Deianeira may be, she is a fictional creation belonging to a different

[3] Cedric Whitman, *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1951), 21.

[4] Kirkwood, 175-77.

order from that of Antigone. She, and Tecmessa too, are a great deal more like Creusa in the *Ion* or Alcestis, or even Phaedra.

In fact, Sophoclean drama is a great deal more "Euripidean" than most people want to admit. We all have been thoroughly conditioned to the idea that all of Sophoclean drama is—as *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* assuredly are—what I called above "high tragedy." By "high tragedy" I mean tragedy written in what Northrop Frye calls the "high-mimetic mode," one of the essential characteristics of which is that its hero is superior to his fellow men.[5] I am not about to assert that Sophocles was writing low-mimetic plots, or realistic fiction whose characters, like us, are all too human. For I believe that the extant plays of Sophocles manifest a considerable variety of intention and strategy. But it must be admitted that critics generally have been uncomfortable in their interpretation of the *Trachiniae*; and a primary reason for this is that it has no very satisfactory hero. An essential characteristic of high tragedy is that it compels no doubts about the justice of the order of things. Frye calls high-mimetic tragedy "the fiction of the fall of the leader." The hero is an exceptional man, whose downfall is intelligible because it is directly connected with his exceptional qualities.[6] By raising himself above the common herd of men he puts himself in an exposed position. On the one hand we are inspired by the nobility of such a hero's aspirations or his endurance of adversity. But since his destruction derives in some way from himself we can understand and accept it and are not outraged. This special relationship between the hero and his destruction is missing in the case of Deianeira, whose emotions are warm and generous, but ordinary and even homely, and who is almost entirely an innocent victim. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, in Aristotle's terms, her destruction is μιαρόν.

Aristotle's critical judgement misled him when, as he seems to do, he rejected this kind of plot as a means of artistic expression; for art need not be moral. But he was right to deny it the cachet of tragedy, for it is not tragedy as he defined it. It belongs to a different literary mode (to use Frye's terminology); and though it can be

[5] Northrop Frye, *An Anatomy of Criticism* (New York 1967; repr. of first edition, Princeton 1957), 33-34. Frye says, more fully, that the hero of the high-mimetic mode is superior in degree (rather than in kind) to his fellow men but not to his environment.

[6] Frye, 37-38.

effective, its effect is quite different. The admiration of Antigone's strength, which is an important ingredient of our response to that play, is absent in Sophocles' account of Deianeira's destruction, and we are left with a disturbed sense of injustice and futility. It seems to me that this feeling of disturbance and disquiet is a dominant effect of each of the non-Theban plays—certainly of the *Trachiniae*, *Ajax*, and *Electra*. In none of these plays can anyone without a strong religious bias find much evidence of the benign working of divinity in human affairs. And something is "wrong" with the hero or heroes of each one; that is, our admiration of them at least is seriously compromised. Not only is Deianeira not reaching up after some great thing in full consciousness of the possible consequences; there is a suggestion that there is a subconscious, irrational element in her motivation. She is preocccupied by her female condition, and she is prey to sexual fears and fantasies reminiscent of Phaedra's.[7]

In the case of Ajax, few critics have been willing to face the implications of Ajax' madness and Athena's quiet amusement at it. Ajax is made a clown, like the mad Lear, but earlier in the play.[8] We first see him as a grotesque object of fun, stripped of all dignity, and this colors our view of him for the play's remainder. This is not to say that the theme of the *Ajax*, the choice of death over dishonor, is not a tragic theme, but the element of the grotesque mocks the tragedy and cheats it of its full impact. Ajax realizes this when he

[7] In my opinion the effort to make Heracles the play's major character is the result of a desperate recognition that Deianeira won't quite do. We see Heracles only at the end of the play and only *in extremis*. The picture of him is very one-sided. There is no evidence of any mental conflict within him, and it is hard to see him as much more than a self-centered brute. Any nobility which some may profess to see is drawn from the traditional figure of Heracles, not from Sophocles' figure. The reason for Heracles' appearance at the end of the play is not something I am confident that I understand, but I suggest tentatively that he appears as an ironic comment upon the fears and desires of Deianeira, with which the play has hitherto been concerned and of which he is the object. A great problem is the anticlimactic quality of the last scene; what happens in the scene has no particular bearing on Deianeira's death. But it is noteworthy that in two of the seven surviving plays, the *Ajax* and the *Trachiniae*, there is a change of direction and an oblique movement away from a climax and away from the central figure.

[8] For a discussion of the theme of the grotesque in *Lear* and its contribution to the play's bleak pessimism see Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, tr. Boleslaw Taborski (Garden City 1964), 87-124. In his recent book on Greek tragedy, *The Eating of the Gods* (New York 1970-73), Kott says, 43-77, that Ajax is humiliated and made absurd.

comes to himself, and tries to redeem his heroic stature, but he fails. The reason he fails is that he has gone as far as possible already. His frustrated attempt to kill his former friends is almost the ultimate gesture of self-importance. With suicide he tries to go one step further. As he himself says, in a world in which he is hated by his fellows and repudiated by the gods, suicide is the only means left to retrieve his lost dignity. But not even in death does he win recognition of his worth from gods or men. For the act of suicide in itself is a surrender of the self-sufficiency to which Ajax lays claim. It does not enforce or compel respect of others, but merely demands it; and it is dependent on the willingness of others to recognize and honor the extreme strength of character that it has required. This willingness Ajax does not find. The gods do not take notice of his final prayer that Teucer find his body in time to bury it; and the last third of the play is a bombastic, burlesque quarrel over his body. In the end he is beholden to the pity of his worst enemy for the privilege of burial.

Electra comes nearer to being a satisfactory Aristotelian heroine. No one can fault her strength or deny that it is successfully implemented. But she also comes nearer to moral infirmity. Her emotions are excessive, distorted by her degrading experiences; she confuses love and hate.[9] Hers is a mangled personality, and the play essentially is a study of abnormal psychology. A recent critic who sees the abnormality of Electra's personality but tries to explain it away, points out that the play "circles" the problem of the extent to which a hero's best qualities may be salvaged from the hellishness of his experience. He concludes that the play gives no clear answer.[10] On the contrary, it does; for Electra's success is the triumph of the destructive forces within her.

That Sophocles' thought has a negative side has not been entirely ignored. Two studies in particular should be mentioned: *Sophocles and Greek Pessimism* by J. C. Opstelten[11] and an influential article by Wolfgang Schadewaldt, "Sophokles und das Leid."[12] However, "pessimism" and "suffering" might describe Sophocles' treatment of Antigone as well as his treatment of Deianeira. If a difference in "mode" exists between the Theban plays and the three I have

[9] Charles Paul Segal, "The *Electra* of Sophocles," *TAPA* 97 (1966), 504.
[10] Segal, 543.
[11] Tr. J. A. Ross (Amsterdam 1952).
[12] See above, note 1.

discussed briefly above, these words are not adequate to distinguish it. Suffering may be felt by high as well as low (and in Schadewaldt's view Sophocles' heroes all are superior individuals who are refined by suffering and become "more themselves" because of it).[13] Pessimism can imply a vision of the good which is disappointed, and it is this that Opstelten sees as a pervasive attitude in Sophocles' thought (and in Greek thought in general).[14] I can think of no single word that might be substituted for "pessimistic" to describe what is distinctive in each of these three plays about Sophocles' conception of his heroes and their circumstances. It is variously pathetic, ironic, brutally realistic and perhaps a dozen other adjectives. The common quality in all three plays might be inadequately described as a lack of illusion. *Contra* Opstelten I can see in these plays no lofty visionary quality, but rather its opposite, the dismissal of the ideal as an object of consideration. The difference from the Theban plays that they share in common is that the poet is not demanding that his audience look up in admiration and awe, but that they look down.

* * *

I have chosen to write about *Philoctetes* because, perhaps more than any other of Sophocles' plays except *Oedipus at Colonus*, it seems on the surface to be affirmative and idealistic, even optimistic. In it both hero-worshipers and pietists find aid and comfort, for (1) it has an undeniably attractive and morally satisfactory hero, and (2) the play ends with a divine intervention which seems to provide a successful denouement. However, I shall try to show that Philoctetes, attractive as he is, is not a hero of high tragedy. He is too passive. He does not inspire the audience with a sense of wonder at man's potential greatness; rather he is the object of its sympathetic pity. He is an undeserving victim of misfortune, to whose warm personality we respond, and whom we want to see compensated for his sufferings. But the significant word is "victim."

[13] Schadewaldt, 244 (see below, p. 37).

[14] Opstelten, 207-208, calls Greek pessimism "a pessimism that has seen and learnt how dangerous a lofty desire for happiness is for man and with how little he ought to be satisfied." He adds that this is "a pessimism of insight rather than of temperament." A few pages later, 211, he says that, in tragedy, out of pessimism a kind of optimism emerges and, "In so far as the play turns on heroism the value in human feeling which we call 'optimism' is perhaps best explained as a 'belief in man and in his ἀρετή.' "

I shall try to show that the play's efforts are devoted to creating a sense of indignation at Philoctetes' suffering more than one of admiration of his resistance.

To some critics the problem of Philoctetes' impotence and the suffering he has endured does not seem an important one, because they consider a reassertion of divine justice to be the play's primary concern. After all, the gods' purpose is to make amends to Philoctetes, is it not? However, as I shall argue, the validity of this interpretation depends almost solely on the *ex machina* ending. For until almost the end of the play it is not the gods' benevolence that is emphasized, but its opposite. Much of the play concerns itself with the question of the reason for the gods' willingness for Philoctetes to suffer so, and with a dramatic demonstration of the intensity of his suffering. As the play progresses, more and more it directs itself to the question whether Philoctetes' salvation, his return to the Greek army, will benefit him as much as it will benefit his enemies. The glory and reputation among the Greeks at Troy, which is the chief benefit that the gods will bestow upon Philoctetes, is shown long before the end of the play to be of no value to him. Philoctetes considers it a thing of honor, but a thing of shame, to consort with and win repute among men whom he considers to be dishonorable. Thus the intervention of the god, which is essential to the pietists' interpretation of the play, in itself makes their interpretation a difficult one. For the *deus ex machina* directly reverses the whole movement of the play and is so inconsonant with it as to seem absurd.[15] Happy ending, nice and tidy.

Most critics seem to have felt the inappropriateness of the *deus* and have felt the need to apologize for it or explain it away. A few—two of these, paradoxically, among the most discerning—have simply abandoned critical responsibility, denying that the *deus* is functional. Thus I. M. Linforth, whose monograph is the most searching and sensible thing written on the *Philoctetes*, complains of Heracles' appearance as a "cavalier procedure," but explains that it is completely external to the action, an ending tacked on to make the play agree with the myth. He adds, "The plain fact is that the drama of Philoctetes' resistance to the mission of

[15] Karin Alt, "Schicksal und Physis im *Philoktet* des Sophokles," *Hermes* 89 (1961), 172, whose interpretation is of the pietist persuasion, compares Heracles' appearance here with the Euripidean *deus ex machina* and admits that it is as paradoxical as any in Euripides.

Odysseus is ended when he is about to sail for home ...." [16] Kitto, too, says that before the *deus ex machina* "... the logical design ... is complete." [17] This "logical design" to Kitto is the defeat of Odysseus and the Atreidae, Philoctetes' enemies. Kitto admits that their ends are furthered by the *deus*, but he asserts that we don't *feel* that this is so.[18] This, I believe, is an aesthetic error, not essentially different from an art critic's denying that a statue's head is missing which he considers to be disproportionate to the body. Kitto and Linforth dislike the dissonant ending, if I may shift the metaphor, and consequently they deny its aesthetic effectiveness.

It is to Kitto's and Linforth's credit that they did hear this dissonance and admit it. Many more critics have claimed that the *deus ex machina* is a continuation and culmination of the action of the play. Such critics must emphasize the importance of Odysseus' unsuccessful machinations in furtherance of the gods' oracle. Odysseus, the argument goes, attempts to use his knowledge of the oracle in order to manipulate it for the sake of success, but with his insufficient human understanding he comes to grief.[19] When Neoptolemus abandons deceit and attempts to persuade Philoctetes in all sincerity, it is too late. Finally, when human efforts fail the gods take a direct hand. What man has attempted in vain the gods accomplish.[20] Philoctetes' quick turnabout and consent to do what he hitherto has steadfastly refused to do is a problem because it is so sudden that it seems unmotivated. Some explain that it is not a sudden reversal of intention at all, for Heracles appeals to Philoctetes as a friend and not on the basis of authority; Philoctetes has been prepared for such an appeal by Neoptolemus' attempts to reach him through friendship and

[16] Ivan M. Linforth, "Philoctetes, the Play and the Man," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15 (1956), 151-52.

[17] H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1960), 136. First published, London 1956.

[18] Kitto, 136-37.

[19] According to Hans Diller, "Göttliches und menschliches Wissen bei Sophokles," *Gottheit und Mensch in der Tragödie des Sophokles* (Darmstadt 1963), 1-27 = *Kieler Univ. Reden* 1 (1950), man's attempt to exploit his knowledge of a divine dispensation is a characteristic theme of Sophocles' later tragedies. See pp. 20-21, 25-26 *et passim*.

[20] Bowra, 282-84, 299-301. See also B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964), 120; Eilhard Schlesinger, "Die Intrige im Aufbau von Sophokles' *Philoktet*," *RhM* 111 (1968), esp. pp. 103, 124, 155-156.

persuasion.[21] To others Philoctetes' sudden change of heart is an indication of his piety and his willingness to defer to the superior authority of heaven.[22] The god Heracles is able to explain to Philoctetes the meaning of the wrong done to him, as Neoptolemus, with his insufficient human knowledge, cannot, and Philoctetes' piety prevails over his hatred.[23]

I shall discuss later in more detail whether in fact the play ends in success, and whether the intervention of the gods does accomplish justice and happiness for Philoctetes. Here I want only to observe that if the appearance and speech of Heracles is intended to provide a spectacular and climactic resolution, showing the superior wisdom and benevolence of the gods, it is utterly unsuccessful. Kitto thinks it a colorless speech; [24] rather it is cursory and facile. It tells Philoctetes only that it is the will of the gods that he go to Troy where he will be cured and will be triumphant. Heracles tells Philoctetes nothing that Philoctetes has not heard before and rejected.[25] The issue that is at the source of Philoctetes' resistance, and on which the play's action turns, is whether justice ultimately exists in the world, why the evil prosper and the good suffer (see below, pp. 43-46). But the claim of some critics that the god explains

[21] See esp. N. T. Pratt, Jr., "Sophoclean Orthodoxy in the *Philoctetes*," *AJP* 70 (1949), 286-87 and Herbert Musurillo, *The Light and the Darkness* (Leiden 1967), 118.

[22] S. M. Adams, *Sophocles the Playwright. Phoenix Supplement* 3 (Toronto 1957), 135: "Philoctetes accords to heaven what he could not to any mortal."

[23] Antonio Maddalena, *Sofocle* (Turin 1959), 263-65. See also G. Perrotta, *Sofocle* (Milan 1935), 469; Robert Muth, "Gottheit und Mensch im *Philoktet*," *Studi in onori di Luigi Castiglioni* 2 (Florence n.d.), 648-49; Bowra, 306.

[24] Kitto, 105: "[The speech provides] not the inevitable conclusion of a tragic action which finds its catharsis in the illumination that it brings, but simply a satisfactory ending."

[25] Linforth, 150: "Thus Herakles requires Philoctetes to do precisely what he has persistently refused to do. But he speaks with total disregard of all that has occurred through the course of the play .... He speaks as if he were unaware of Odysseus' intrigue and Philoctetes' passionate resistance .... He says nothing to meet Philoctetes' objections, and he makes no promises for the future which Philoctetes has not already heard."

Andreas Spira, *Untersuchungen zum Deus ex machina bei Sophokles und Euripides*, (Kallmunz 1960), 27, believes that the *deus* does offer Philoctetes an additional incentive: glory (or, more specifically, that Heracles tells him that he has been prepared by suffering for glory). However, fame is a completely inadequate recompense for Philoctetes' suffering, for to him it is not of any value. And the suggestion that he will win glory if he goes to Troy has been made before, both implicitly and explicitly (ll. 997-98, 1344-47) and has been emphatically repudiated (see below, pp. 42-43). To him a return to the Greek army would mean not glory but shame (see below, p. 47).

the meaning of Philoctetes' suffering could not be further from the truth. The speech of Heracles completely ignores the question of justice (see below, pp. 50-51).

The *deus ex machina*, then, is a resolution which does not resolve; it is a *non sequitur*. This irrelevance, or pointlessness, is what prompted Kitto and Linforth to suggest the *deus* is "external" to the play—in other words, that it has no meaning. But can it not be that the pointlessness itself has meaning? The gods' casual disregard of Philoctetes' anguished questions about the reason for the existence of so much apparent injustice implies that they have no interest in them—which is to say that they have no interest in what has previously happened in the play.[26] Their achievement by *fiat* of their desires makes the struggles which have taken place on the stage, and over which the audience has agonized, completely inconsequential. The use of the *non sequitur*, the calculated absence of causal relationship between events, is a primary device of the modern theater of the absurd, which so often deals with the theme of the meaninglessness of life; surely in the mid-twentieth century this is a device that we should be able to appreciate. If the *deus ex machina* is not merely an artistic failure, if Sophocles did not for some reason in this short speech fail to say what he intended to say, then the playwright is thumbing his nose at his audience, and at mankind.

But assume for the sake of argument that the *deus ex machina* was a failure, and that Sophocles was attempting through it to indicate the justice and benevolence of the gods. It must be seen that if the *deus* is to be regarded as the completion of the previous action rather than as a reversal, then the focus of the play must be on Odysseus' machinations and Neoptolemus' efforts to implement them. In other words, the play must be a play of intrigue. This cannot be overemphasized: if the *deus ex machina* is to be considered the natural conclusion of the plot, like the appearance of Athena in *Iphigeneia in Tauris* or of the Dioscuri in *Helen* or of the sun-god's chariot in *Medea*, then it must accomplish the end toward which the actions of the important characters are directed. This means that in this play Odysseus, Neoptolemus, and their intrigue must be of first interest. Many critics have at least dimly recognized this, and it is common to speak of the play as a play of intrigue.

[26] See Opstelten [above, note 11], 220.

I am not about to say that intrigue is not of crucial importance to the plot. But clearly it is not of primary interest. Very few lines of the play are devoted to furtherance of the intrigue, and very many lines are devoted to Philoctetes' expressions of emotional reaction to what is happening to him and has happened. But, aside from this, a plot of intrigue requires (1) that the goal to be attained should be clear from an early point, and (2) that, if the details of the intrigue are not made known to the audience, at least the audience should be able to recognize each act as contributing to the achievement of its goal. This is notoriously not the case in *Philoctetes*. The full revelation of the oracle, defining the goal of the intrigue, is not given until almost the end of the play; and as late as line 1080, when Odysseus leaves the stage with the bow, there must be some doubt in the minds of the audience whether the conspirators' purpose is to obtain Philoctetes or only the bow. Certainly about Odysseus' strategy there is not only doubt but confusion. Even Eilhard Schlesinger, who emphasizes the importance of the intrigue, points out that in the first scene, contrary to the practice of Euripides, who is the great master of drama of intrigue, Sophocles fails to let us know precisely what Odysseus' plan is.[27] I submit that if we are honest with ourselves we must admit that at the end of the play we still do not know precisely what Odysseus intended. Most critics assert that at line 1080 Odysseus is bluffing, trying to get Philoctetes to follow. But do we know that this is so?

There are two or three points in the play at which the intention of one or other of the conspirators is unquestionably vague or ambiguous. Why at line 639 does Neoptolemus refuse to sail, saying that the wind is unfavorable? At line 526 he has implied that it *is* favorable. It generally is assumed that this is because Neoptolemus has a sudden attack of scruples, but Schlesinger believes that getting Philoctetes on board ship while he still is in possession of his weapons is the last thing Neoptolemus wants, and that it cannot be part of Odysseus' plan.[28] What then was Odysseus' plan? Why does Odysseus send the false merchant, if not to hurry Philoctetes on board ship? Why at line 839 does Neoptolemus state to the chorus, which is urging him to take the bow and run, that the bow

[27] Schlesinger, 110. In a note Schlesinger refers to H. Strohm, *Euripides, Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form. Zetemata* 15 (Munich 1957), 64 ff.
[28] Schlesinger, 114-15.

is worthless without Philoctetes himself? Does he suddenly see, as some say, that Odysseus is wrong and that to steal the bow is to cause their mission to founder?[29] Or is he acting out of more general humanitarian reasons?[30] These points of vagueness have been worried over many times by critics who have realized instinctively that they should not exist in a drama of intrigue, and who have answered their own questions with a distressing arbitrary positiveness; distressing because it obscures the fact that the answers are not given in the text of the play itself. I assert that the vagueness is there because Sophocles does not care about the mechanics of the intrigue at all; and the obvious reason for this is that the intrigue is not the focus of interest, but lies in the background. The plot does not move toward the attainment of the object of the intrigue; rather the fact of the intrigue only initiates the real action of the play. The focus of interest is Philoctetes who, with his generous and mercurial emotions, dominates the stage from the moment he enters. The play is about Philoctetes', and to a lesser extent Neoptolemus', reaction to the deception, as well as to the wrongs done to Philoctetes in the past which are of a kind with it.

* * *

A few pages back I suggested that one of the reasons why Sophoclean critics feel at home with this play is that the attractive, vividly drawn protagonist is of the type considered to be the hallmark of Sophoclean drama. He is a much more satisfactory hero than either Ajax or Heracles, whose personalities are veiled by their reticence, and unlike Electra's his basic moral soundness is not open to question. In fact, in the extravagance of his emotions, his generosity and good-will, he is more like the Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* than any other Sophoclean hero. Because his emotions are so intense, his likes and dislikes so pronounced, and his conviction of the wrongs done to him so unshakeable, it is tempting to see in him the strong-willed, self-assertive hero who belongs to high tragedy. The vigor and forcefulness of his personality after so much suffering have often been admired. "There is an indurate

[29] Alt [above, note 15], 158-59; Bowra, 281; Karl Reinhardt, *Sophokles* (Frankfurt-am-Main 1947 [3]), 190-91; Adams, 150, 154.

[30] Linforth, 130; Georges Méautis, *Sophocle: Essai sur le héros tragique* (Paris 1957), 80-81.

quality," says Norman Pratt. "But he has endured and has maintained his intellectual vigor. He shows breadth of sympathy, affection, even tenderness toward Neoptolemus. There is an eager spirit and sensitivity to kindness."[31] From here it is only a step to the idea that these are exceptional qualities of character that lie at the source of his near-tragic decision—the implication being that it is his own strength that places him within an inch of destruction. Thus Pratt can speak of Philoctetes' "greatness."[32] In the play itself Neoptolemus, in effect, calls Philoctetes hubristic (1316-21):

ἀνθρώποισι τὰς μὲν ἐκ θεῶν
τύχας δοθείσας ἔστ' ἀναγκαῖον φέρειν·
ὅσοι δ' ἑκουσίοισιν ἔγκεινται βλάβαις,
ὥσπερ σύ, τούτοις οὔτε συγγνώμην ἔχειν
δίκαιόν ἐστιν οὔτ' ἐποικτίρειν τινά.
σὺ δ' ἠρίωσαι.

But we should not make the mistake of assuming therefore that Sophocles believes that Philoctetes is wrong—or even that the character Neoptolemus does so, for within less than 200 lines Neoptolemus has consented, at risk to himself, to support Philoctetes in his obstinacy. It is one thing to believe, as Neoptolemus clearly does, that Philoctetes is imprudent to refuse to yield to ineluctable forces, but it is another to think that the catastrophe threatening him is one of his own making.

Philoctetes' enforced isolation may call to mind the isolation of Achilles, and the influence of the *Iliad* on this play (the delegation headed by Odysseus, the threat to return home, etc.) has been remarked upon.[33] Going beyond these superficial similarities, P. W. Harsh has suggested that Achilles and Philoctetes are comparable in mental attitude.[34] But similarities between Philoctetes and Achilles, who may be considered almost the archetypal hero of high tragedy, are misleading. The briefest comparison will show that Philoctetes differs from Achilles fundamentally and generically. (1) Achilles exiles himself, while Philoctetes is a pariah. He does not set in motion the series of events that destroy him or make

[31] Pratt [above, note 21], 280.

[32] Pratt, 278.

[33] Schlesinger [above, note 20], 103-05, 114.

[34] P. W. Harsh, "The Role of the Bow in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles," *AJP* 81 (1960), 410.

any free decision whatever until about line 1350 of a 1470 line play. (2) Both Achilles and Philoctetes reject petitions to come to the aid of the Greek army, but for very different reasons. Achilles' anger initially and essentially is directed against only one man. As the *Iliad* progresses he becomes increasingly alienated from his fellow-men, but this alienation, rather than being deeply felt, is simply a corollary of his ambition: he is dissatisfied with the honor given him by the Greek army. His concern for his fellows, for their well-being and for their opinion of him is obvious; if he had no such concern there is nothing to stop him from sailing home, as he threatens in Book IX. The conflict leading to Achilles' tragic downfall comes from within himself; it is compounded of contradictory impulses to help his fellows and to isolate himself from them. Philoctetes, on the other hand, despite Harsh,[35] is divided by no such conflicting feelings. He does not, like Achilles, create his own problem. The need to help the Greeks is imposed upon him by an outside force—the will of the gods. He feels no inner compulsion whatever to help the Greek army, because he has no fellow-feeling for them at all. To his way of thinking the good among them have died, and only the evil survive unscathed (403-52). He does not, moreover, like Achilles, resist out of wounded pride or ambition for something better; rather his resistance comes from a determination not to sink lower; to return to the Greeks would be to help the evil and to seem to be like them (1371-72; see below, pp. 43-47). Philoctetes', then, is a passive response to a purely external initiative. (3) Achilles' decision derives from his dissatisfaction with his lot as a man. He is conscious of his superiority to other men; disillusion at their failure adequately to recognize true excellence prompts his physical and emotional withdrawal from them. Philoctetes, because of his brutal appearance (226) and his odor (473, 481-83), has a strong sense of his own inferiority. He feels that in the past he has been despised by other visitors to his island who have bothered to grant him no more than casual charity (307-11, 494-99). He wants nothing more than to be allowed to return to the company of men. When Neoptolemus and his sailors arrive he is pathetically glad to see them (234-44). And even after he knows that the chorus of sailors have betrayed him, and he rejects them with one part of his mind, he cannot bear to see them leave,

[35] Harsh, 408-10.

but begs for a few moments more of their company (1181-85, 1190).

So far is Philoctetes from being a man whose strength has raised him to an exposed position. It is true that near the end of the play Philoctetes does refuse to return to Troy in spite of knowing that this is the wish of the gods and even the decree of fate. Reckless and audacious folly probably is too mild a description of this defiance and it is reasonable to regard it as hubristic. But it seems to me that wir Philologen are much too inclined to be formulaic in our literary analyses; to look for the hubris, and, when we have found a place to attach the label, to regard the work in question as completely understood. Events fitting the formula should not be too much abstracted from the rest of the play. This, in large measure, is the reason for our difficulty in appreciating Euripides, who notoriously is the Greek tragedian most imitated by modern artists and least discussed by modern scholars. Philoctetes' defiance must be seen in the context of what has happened and what has been said before in the play—that is, in relation to his past sufferings. However, because we expect a moral judgement of the protagonist to be a basic concern of tragedy, the importance of Philoctetes' disregard of the gods' oracle and refusal to go to Troy, late as it occurs in the play, is vastly overemphasized. We are told that he suffers from the sin of pride (!), that he is blind, that he is deluded by his hate, that his understanding is insufficient.[36] He is even linked with Odysseus in his delusion and his all-too-human refusal to have anything to do with truth, which can come only from the gods.[37]

Now certainly delusion is a subject dealt with in this play. One of the pointed ironies is that the clever Odysseus is deluded in his choice of a course of action; but surely the most significant thing about Odysseus is that he is a man without conscience or any true concern for the good. To compare Philoctetes' mental and moral state in any way with Odysseus' is a serious misreading of the play

[36] Respectively: Maddalena [above, note 23], 260; Bowra, 291; Alt, 165, 169; Reinhardt, 200.

[37] Bowra, 263, 284-85; see also Alt, 173-74. Reinhardt's critical instinct enabled him to see that most of the play is calculated to make us feel sympathy for Philoctetes and anger toward those who wronged him; so that he did not make the mistake of equating Philoctetes' and Odysseus' guilt. But his need to see Philoctetes as more than an innocent victim led him to confusion and contradiction: Philoctetes is right as a "sufferer" but wrong as a "doer" (p. 195), whatever that means.

and betrays the all-too-Christian limitations of the critics' understanding. It is a judgement of an ethic that tends, at least, to regard all sins as equal and believes (as Bowra does not scruple to say in connection with this play[38]) that the divine can do no wrong. No critic, except Harsh and those who follow him,[39] ever specifies what it is that Philoctetes is blind to, or what it is in the big picture that he doesn't see and understand, and the playwright himself curiously omits to instruct Philoctetes or us on this point. The only admonition made to Philoctetes that mentions defiance of the gods warns, not that his understanding or his moral position is inferior, but only that he is weaker. Neoptolemus (1316-17; see above p. 13) says, It is necessary for men to bear the fortunes given to them by the gods.

The critical myopia that concentrates on the last lines, where Philoctetes is defiant, at so great an expense to the rest of the play, and puts the guilt of the sufferer in the same category with that of his persecutor, is due ultimately to a failure to classify this play generically, or, as Frye would say, according to mode. The play belongs not to Frye's high-mimetic mode (see above, p. 3 and note 5) but to what he calls the "ironic" mode. The hero of the ironic mode is not superior to ordinary mortals, but is inferior in power, "... so that [when the plot is a tragic one] we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity."[40] Philoctetes, vivid as his personality may be and outspoken as he is, is much more like Deianeira in his inability to help himself than like Oedipus.

From line 33, when Neoptolemus describes to Odysseus what he sees inside Philoctetes' cave, it is apparent that Philoctetes' is a different world from that of Oedipus, secure in his proud Thebes, surrounded by loyal subjects. Neoptolemus speaks of a bed of leaves, a rough wooden cup, kindling wood, and pieces of cloth stained with pus, spread out to dry. Philoctetes is a pitiable figure, a "Euripidean" hero dressed in rags. At his first appearance, before

[38] Bowra, 284-85.

[39] Harsh, 412, believes that Philoctetes should see that the bow is bigger than he is and is destined for great things. "Heracles," he says, "made civilization possible by achieving man's mastery over the beast and civilized man's superiority over the barbarian." The bow, his weapon, symbolizes all this. See also Knox [above, note 20], 140; Musurillo [above, note 21], 121; Alt, 171-72. For a discussion of this idea see below, p. 22.

[40] Frye [above, note 5], 34.

he becomes aware of the presence of the other men, he is heard crying aloud at the pain of his hurt and the excruciating difficulty of his struggles to move (201-18). His suffering is not merely physical. Emphasis is placed on his loneliness and isolation (see 169-72, 280-82, *et passim*),[41] and the bare adequacy of his resources; only with constant desperate effort can he maintain a hold on the edge of life (273-75, 285-99). The effect of these sufferings has been to rob him of all pride. Within the first few lines that he speaks to Neoptolemus he begs for pity in his friendless, desolate torment (227-29). He pleads abjectly to Neoptolemus to take him home, or if he cannot be bothered to do that, at least to take him as far as Euboea (468-506). As I mentioned above he is aware that his odor is offensive to other men, and he is anxious for it to cause the least annoyance possible on the voyage (481-83). He is sensitive about the odor because in the past he has begged other chance visitors to the island to take him home, but they have refused, contenting

[41] So much has been written about the "isolation" of the Sophoclean hero that it seems necessary at this point to emphasize, what should be obvious, that the following two typical remarks are not in any way descriptive of the situation of Philoctetes, the loneliest of Sophoclean heroes:

"The consequence of [the hero's] intransigence is that isolation which has so often been described as the mark of the Sophoclean hero (Knox, 32)."

"Human greatness is of such a nature, the poet seems to have realized, that it simply cannot exist without being lonely (Opstelten [above, note 11], 191)."

The observation of W. Schadewaldt [above, note 1], 244, that the Sophoclean hero becomes more himself through suffering (see below p. 37) is equally inappropriate to Philoctetes. Philoctetes is not isolated by his own greatness, but by forces outside his own control. And his suffering is far more a debasing than a refining and exalting process.

The only writer who has appreciated the extent of Philoctetes' degradation is Jan Kott, in a very recent book on Greek tragedy, *The Eating of the Gods* (New York 1970-73), which came into my hands only when this manuscript was in the last stage of correction before printing. Kott says, 169, that, "Philoctetes is thrown to the very bottom of the human condition." However, Kott's view of the play as a whole is not at all clear, for his strange, often irritatingly elusive essay on *Philoctetes* is not really a literary analysis at all, but an appreciation written from the point of view of an existentialist and a man who experienced the horrors of World War II. Thus his belief that Philoctetes is brought very low is difficult to correlate with his emphasis, 168-69 *et passim*, on Philoctetes' being a special person, chosen by the gods. The seeming conflict of ideas is to be explained, I think, by the fact that Kott would not accept the distinction, which I put forward, between high tragedy and tragedy belonging to the ironic mode. To Kott all tragic heroes are victims, all prisoners of the human condition. So Prometheus, 35-42, is as helpless as Philoctetes, his seeming freedom of choice a delusion, his suffering ultimately meaningless.

themselves with a few words of pity and a little charity for which he has had to be grateful (305-11). He has sent messages by these men in the past, but they have had no effect, and he suspects that the travelers have not considered him worth the trouble even to do this much (494-99). Philoctetes is a man who has been maimed spiritually as well as physically. He is, like Lear, a ruin'd piece of nature.

Whether Aristotle was right in his insistence that tragedy must be moral, at least it is important to see that the plot of this play —by whatever name it may be called—is immoral. In this alone of Sophocles' dramas there is an outright villain, a persecutor (who is not, to be sure, responsible for all of Philoctetes' woes), and an innocent victim. The action of the play is a gradual revelation of the cruelties suffered by Philoctetes in the past, and in the present a progressive intensification of his torment. It may be—a thing which I doubt—that the *deus ex machina* reverses the movement and cancels out the previous disregard of Philoctetes' good. But the peculiar thing about this play is that, at least until the last scene, it almost entirely ignores the good that may come, to Philoctetes or to others, of his going to Troy and concentrates instead upon the wrong being done him by Odysseus' ruthlessness and on the cruelties endured by him in the past. He has wandered by accident into the precinct of the goddess Chryse and has been bitten by a snake which is the goddess' avatar. Because of his smell and the annoyance of his cries of anguish he has lost his right to associate with others, and is deserted by his fellows. In the extremity of his necessity he loses much of his sense of equality with others. This progressive accumulation of woes might be viewed as a process of stripping away of his physical and mental resources. He loses first his health, then his security as a member of society, then his sense of dignity as a man among men. And this process of stripping continues into the present, until the dramatic turning-point late in the play when Neoptolemus takes back the bow from Odysseus and returns it to Philoctetes. For surely it is obvious that Odysseus' trickery with which he acquires the bow is of a piece with his deceitful abandonment of Philoctetes ten years before.

Up to line 895, when Neoptolemus decides that he must abandon deceit and tell Philoctetes the truth, much of the play is devoted to a disclosure of the details of this suffering that Philoctetes

previously has endured and his anger at the injustice of it: how he was bitten by Chryse and abandoned, the appearance of his cave, his struggles to sustain life, his hatred of Odysseus and the Atreidae, etc. *Philoctetes* is not a past-tense narrative, however, but a work of drama; all the while before the eyes of the audience is a reminder of the present occasion: Neoptolemus, whose intention is to deceive. Gradually this present occasion is brought into focus with the past. Partly, especially early in the play, this is by implication only, as when we learn from Philoctetes that it was by trickery and stealth that Odysseus abandoned him (268-75). The visit of the false merchant (542-627), however, makes explicit the fact that Odysseus is as callous in his rescue of Philoctetes, and as unconcerned about Philoctetes' wishes, as he was when he deserted him. The merchant-scene is one of two scenes (the other is the attack of the disease that strikes Philoctetes) that have worried critics because they have seemed episodic and unmotivated. They seem so only if the plot is regarded as a plot of intrigue. The merchant's visit does not further the goal of tricking Philoctetes into setting sail with Neoptolemus. We should not therefore waste time trying to imagine what Odysseus expected the merchant to accomplish. At this point in the play (or at any other for that matter) the audience is interested not in what is going on in Odysseus' mind but in the depth of Philoctetes' emotion. The purpose of the scene is to warn Philoctetes that Odysseus is more than just the perpetrator of an old wrong: he is a present threat. The merchant tells Philoctetes three-quarters of the truth: that the gods have proclaimed that it is necessary for the Greeks to bring him to Troy and that Odysseus has boasted, at the wager of his own head, that he will accomplish this (614-19). The function of the merchant is to inform Philoctetes that Odysseus has sworn to return Philoctetes to the Greeks will he nill he like a piece of chattel goods, in order that Neoptolemus, and we, may see what this mission of his looks like from Philoctetes' perspective. When Neoptolemus began his effort to insinuate himself into Philoctetes' graces he told himself that all of Philoctetes' torment was in the past (191-200). Now Neoptolemus is forced to face squarely the fact of Philoctetes' adamant opposition to his present intentions. Philoctetes predictably regards this as one more act of persecution. It will be another humiliation, to be brought back by Odysseus and exhibited among the Greeks (630). From this point Philoctetes'

enmity no longer is a generalized thing, related to ills suffered long ago; and Neoptolemus, as his final decision to consent to do Philoctetes' will shows, now finds it impossible casually to rationalize the machinations against Philoctetes on the grounds that it is all in Philoctetes' own best interests. The sudden attack of Philoctetes' disease (732-826) serves much the same function as the news told by the merchant. It brings home to the audience and to Neoptolemus the enormity of what Philoctetes has been suffering. His physical torture is as great as that of a victim on the rack. Surely a man who has endured so much, whose wishes have been so often thwarted, should not have imposed on him any new hurt, of body or spirit.

But the hurt and the degradation are going on in the present, which emerges clearly as a continuation of the past. As I have said above, Philoctetes has felt before the disregard of other visitors to the island. Now the disingenuous claim of Neoptolemus not to know of him makes him feel that he has lost even his identity in the world, that he has become the forgotten man. His awesome sufferings to other men are not worth even the trouble of mention (254-56):

> ὦ πόλλ' ἐγὼ μοχθηρός, ὦ πικρὸς θεοῖς,
> οὗ μηδὲ κληδὼν ὧδ' ἔχοντος οἴκαδε
> μηδ' Ἑλλάδος γῆς μηδαμοῖ διῆλθέ που.

How different from the Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus* who uses the first person pronoun seventeen times in his first speech. But worse than neglect, Philoctetes is forced to endure the insults of the man he hates most in the world, who thinks him hardly worth the bother of addressing (πόλλ' ἂν λέγειν ἔχοιμι πρὸς τὰ τοῦδ' ἔπη, / εἴ μοι παρείκοι, 1047-48). Finally he must watch that man walk away, the master of his bow (1054-69). And when in the face of Odysseus' insolence he attempts to jump off the cliff he is denied even the dignity of suicide (1001-1003).

Odysseus' taking of the bow has been another critical problem. There has been endless discussion about the precise wording of the oracle, whether Odysseus understands it properly or not, and the intention of Odysseus' strategem. When Philoctetes falls asleep after his attack of illness Neoptolemus refuses to leave without him, saying that the god ordered that he be brought, not just his bow (839-41). Odysseus, on the other hand, never speaks of anything

but the bow, and when he walks away with it he says that either he or Teucer can wield it successfully. Is Odysseus in his egotistical self-assurance guilty of a rank misinterpretation of the oracle?[42] Or does Odysseus in reality understand that Philoctetes must come with the bow and be persuaded, and is he merely resorting to a kind of "Melian persuasion?"[43] Speculations of this sort ultimately are fruitless, for the play gives us no evidence of exactly what is going on in Odysseus' mind. It does not do so obviously because Sophocles does not think that it is important to know. But more than that, these speculations betray a lack of critical perspective. They result from a confusion of real life with what Susanne Langer calls the "virtual life" of an artistic creation.[44] When Odysseus walks off with the bow, he does not think anything because he is not a real person; the artistic conception "Odysseus" does not think anything because we are given no hint of what it may be. And the reason we are given no hint is that Odysseus' strategem is of no interest at this time. The audience at this point in the play is seeing things through the eyes of Philoctetes, who is as articulate as Odysseus is laconic, and whose feelings are as clear as Odysseus' intentions are obscure. The audience is not speculating about why Odysseus acts as he does, but is feeling outrage and despair with Philoctetes. It is saying to itself, "Even this ..."

Schlesinger is near to the truth of the reason for Odysseus' taking the bow when he says that, to the world of political machination which Odysseus represents, a man does not mean much more than a tool.[45] To Odysseus Philoctetes the man has no more intrinsic value than the bow. And by Odysseus' treatment of him Philoctetes is reduced to the status of a thing, an inanimate object, to be discarded or retrieved at will. Odysseus is almost right, too. Philoctetes has been so degraded by his evils, stripped so naked of his physical defences and his self-respect, that if he is more than a thing, he is less than a peer of men.

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[42] Bowra, 267; Diller [above, note 19], 20-21.

[43] Alt [above, note 15], 148, 165; Schlesinger [above, note 20], 118, 123; A. E. Hinds, "The Prophecy of Helenus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *CQ* n.s.17 (1967), 177-78.

[44] Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York 1953), 212-14, 245.

[45] Schlesinger, 119. See also Linforth [above, note 16], 103-05. Odysseus' concentration on the bow, says Linforth, is a means of characterizing Odysseus and emphasizes his concern for the impersonal instrument and his disregard of the man.

I mentioned above (note 39) that certain critics emphasize the importance of the divine associations of the bow, and believe that Philoctetes is derelict in his refusal to serve the bow's greater destiny. Perhaps it is enough to say that there is no evidence whatever for this idea in the play itself. At no time in the play does anyone say or even hint that the bow is an instrument of the powers of Good to which it is Philoctetes' duty to humble himself. (I postpone until later the question, which is seriously posed in the play [see below, pp. 44-48], whether Philoctetes' going to Troy will in fact represent the triumph of good over evil.) In fact, this sounds like an idea more at home in Germanic saga or medieval knights-tales than in Greek literature. The proposition that an inanimate object, however divine its associations, is more important than a man is at the farthest remove from what might be expected of Sophocles. Moreover, if it is true, as I have argued, that the emphasis of this play is upon the torments suffered by Philoctetes, it should then be clear what this idea implies: the moral of this play must be that no suffering of an individual, no matter how excruciating, and no injustice are of any consequence when there arises the question of service to a higher good. Critics of this persuasion, no matter how much they may dislike Odysseus, must admit that it is reasonable for him to concentrate on the bow and to ignore Philoctetes' feelings about the past. I submit that this is psychologically implausible. The play makes every effort to arouse in its audience feelings of pity for Philoctetes and outrage at his suffering. To expect them to suppress these feelings and to look with satisfaction to the triumph of a cause would require an effort to convince them of the cause's importance. This the play does not do. It does not celebrate the glory of some *Aeneid*-like holy mission. If it celebrates anything, it is the importance of a small man's sufferings and his claim to a minimum of self-respect even when this claim stands in conflict with the progress of history.

Whatever transcendant good the bow may represent to Odysseus, to Philoctetes it is his sole tenuous hold on life. It has been his sole companion during his long exile (when it has been taken from him he addresses it as a loved companion, 1128-39) and his only source of sustenance. He identifies his very existence with it. When he is won over to friendship with Neoptolemus his ultimate gesture of trust is to surrender to him the bow (762-73; see also 662-70). And when Odysseus has disdainfully taken it from him, he says,

ἔτ' οὐδέν εἰμι (1217; see also 1030). Philoctetes' degradation has gone virtually as far as it can. He is reduced to begging the chorus who have betrayed him to stay only a little longer (1181-85, 1190). Yet when the chorus advises him in friendship (1121, 1163-64) to yield to Odysseus and fate, he answers, Never, not even if Zeus should strike me with his thunderbolt (1197-99). Something in him is not quite defeated.

* * *

Persecution presupposes a persecutor or persecutors. Among the emotions produced by high tragedy, which Aristotle rather inadequately describes as pity and fear, are included admiration and awe at the excellence of the hero. This admiration brings with it a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction; it is a compensating factor which helps to drive out the demon of the negative emotions, and contributes not a little to what Aristotle calls tragedy's cathartic effect. In a work whose action is primarily directed toward the persecution of a relatively innocent person this satisfaction does not come. The audience feels something like anguish and frustration (along with pity and fear), as well as anger toward the persecutors. Odysseus bears the brunt of this anger in *Philoctetes*.

This type of plot lends itself very well to political propaganda and a particularly biting kind of social criticism. Kitto tries to limit *Philoctetes* entirely to such social criticism,[46] and others have seen in this the major burden of the play's meaning. Odysseus' sophistic attributes are so obvious that it is needless to discuss them, and the relevance of his character to contemporary political and social conditions is inescapable. Jameson's observation is typical: "Sophocles, the recent victim along with much of his audience of a great deception [by the 400 oligarchs], produce[d] a play whose major interest is in the moral and psychological implications ... of the initial deception, the conscious, carefully underlined sacrifice of values to expedience." [47] More specifically Harsh sees in the play the three main character-types discerned by Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War: Odysseus stands for success by treachery, Philoctetes for lust for revenge, Neoptolemus for the ancient

[46] Kitto [above, note 17], 136.

[47] M. H. Jameson, "Politics and the *Philoctetes*," *CP* 51 (1956), 219. See Jameson's article for a brief review of attempts to give contemporary political significance to this play.

simplicity in which honor so largely entered, which was laughed down and disappeared. Charles Fuqua, while he avoids allegorizing the characters of the play, perhaps goes further in emphasizing the importance of the attack on sophistry, asserting that there is an organizational antithesis in the play between φύσις, Neoptolemus' special word, and νόμος.[48]

To be sure, social criticism is an important element in the play, but for several reasons I think that the play is much more than an attack on the decadent mores of "modern" man. If it were only this the play essentially would be no more than a melodrama, with Odysseus, the representative of modern vices, the villain. (1) In the first place, Odysseus is by no means the sole object of the frustrated anger which I have described as one of the play's effects. (2) Odysseus is on the side of the gods. (3) Although the moral conflict as it is stated in the prologue is between "modern" deceitfulness represented by Odysseus and honorable directness of action, or the "ancient simplicity" represented by Neoptolemus, during the course of the play Neoptolemus' moral horizons broaden and he becomes concerned not merely about deceit, but about the larger question of justice; not just about Odysseus' dishonorable means, but about the purpose itself of the mission—which is not of Odysseus' authorship.

In support of (1) it is necessary only to point out that Odysseus is not the agent of much of the wrong about which the play complains: Philoctetes' physical suffering; the fact that just men seem to suffer and unjust men to prosper; the necessity for Philoctetes to serve the interests of and to associate with men whom he considers to be evil. In fact, Odysseus is kept carefully in the background. If Sophocles had wanted the audience to be preoccupied with Odysseus' personal villainy he need only have brought him on stage for half as long as Neoptolemus, so that he might implement his own stratagem and, so to speak, twirl his mustaches. Instead his role is so understated that some critics—I think ludicrously—have been tempted even to find something attractive and sympathetic in him.[49]

[48] Harsh [above, note 34], 409. Charles J. Fuqua, *The Thematic Structure of Sophocles' "Philoctetes,"* unpub. diss. Cornell Univ. 1964, 60, 68-72. Bowra, 286, compares Odysseus' ruthless pursuit of success with that of the Athenians in the Melian dialogue. To Reinhardt [above, note 29], 180-85, the concept of heroism in this play is colored by the spirit of the last third of the Peloponnesian War: "Der Trug ist herrschend, und nicht nur Odysseus ist der Falsche (p. 181)." (That is, even Neoptolemus starts out with a false concept of heroism, in which glory is more important than the deed itself.)

(2) I have asserted that Odysseus is on the side of the gods. In his short scene of confrontation with Philoctetes Odysseus claims to be the servant of Zeus (989-90). Not many lines later the chorus verifies this, saying in effect, It was not our trickery that overcame you but the will of the gods (1116-19). Occasionally it is claimed that these statements are false and merely self-serving,[50] but most critics (usually with distaste) accept them at face value, and the facts of the play speak for themselves. We are told by the false merchant (603-21) and later by Neoptolemus (1324-47) that Odysseus' purpose was ordained by the gods, and this is implicit in the very fact of the mission, since the mission can have no other motivation than the gods' oracle. Of course, it does not necessarily follow that the gods approve of Odysseus' methods just because it is Odysseus' intention to do their will. Those who wish to dissociate the gods from Odysseus emphasize the difference in method proposed by Odysseus and the gods. The argument runs like this: the gods and Odysseus desire the same end—to take Philoctetes to Troy. But the gods have a concern for Philoctetes' self-respect and order that he be persuaded to return to the Greek army, not tricked. Odysseus misunderstands the oracle, or perhaps tries to second-guess the gods, but he is not allowed to succeed in his ruthless purpose. And at this point in the argument solemn and lengthy pronouncements are made about the inadequacy of human understanding.[51]

I think that it is possible that we are supposed to understand that Odysseus' callous disregard of Philoctetes' wishes is contrary to the will of the gods. However, it should be seen that the gods themselves do nothing either to forestall or to repudiate Odysseus' actions. This is done by a man, who, if he is moved to do it by any wish to obey the gods, conspicuously fails to say so, giving as a reason for his action only a concern for honor and justice (1224-51).[52] In any case, the whole argument for Odysseus' misunder-

[49] Muth [above, note 23], 652-55; Méautis [above, note 30], 61, 87-90; Maddalena [above, note 23], 255-56.

[50] Kitto [above, note 17], 122-23, says that when Odysseus says this the audience does not believe him. Harsh, 410, says that the gods do not choose Odysseus as their helper, but that Odysseus unscrupulously adopts a just cause and tries to exploit it.

[51] See, for instance, Bowra, 267-69; Diller [above, note 19], 20-21, 25-27; Reinhardt, 200-201; Maddalena, 262-65.

[52] However, Adams [above, note 22], 18, believes that any magnanimous

standing the gods' will is based ultimately on just two words and the critics' solicitude for the gods' reputation. In line 612 the false merchant says that the gods have decreed that the Greeks will not take Troy unless they fetch Philoctetes, πείσαντες λόγῳ. Now the word πείθειν does not in itself preclude guile. And, as A. E. Hinds has pointed out, in this merchant-scene it is force with which persuasion is contrasted, not guile (593-94, 618).[53] Odysseus, be it noted, carefully avoids force. There is nowhere in the play, then, much evidence that the gods object to Odysseus' methods, and it surely is special pleading to argue that the inadequacy of human understanding is one of the play's primary messages.

The irony sometimes has been remarked upon that the deceitful, unscrupulous Odysseus tries to do the gods' will, while the upright Philoctetes opposes it.[54] But there is an irony much deeper and more bitter than this: that the gods have imposed horrible suffering on Philoctetes, but for Odysseus have prospered all his ways. It is wrong and unnecessary to attribute to the plan or will of the gods Odysseus' gratuitous disdain of Philoctetes' feelings; it is disturbing enough to observe that they show no disapprobation of Odysseus' ruthlessness. In spite of Odysseus' past and present cruelties, the gods' plan coincides precisely with his interests and those of the hated Atreidae.[55] As Philoctetes says (446-

act is *ipso facto* evidence of divine inspiration: "If we look clearly at the Sophoclean portraitures of men and women we must realize that the gods work through the noblest instincts of these people. Everyone who reads these plays must bear in mind that all-important fact: what is best in men and women is used by heaven for the furtherance of its desires." I feel no compulsion to think any such thing, and there is not the smallest shred of evidence in the play that Neoptolemus is inspired by the gods to return the bow. On the contrary, Neoptolemus' sermon immediately after he does so, about the necessity for men to yield to the gods (1314-23), indicates clearly that he realizes that his action has jeopardized the accomplishment of the gods' will.

[53] Hinds [above, note 43], 179. However, once earlier in the play the word πείθειν is used where it clearly refers to artless persuasion. Odysseus says in the prologue (103) that πείθειν will not work on Philoctetes; so that when the words of the oracle contradict him this should be noticed by the audience.

[54] See Kirkwood [above, note 2], 262; Reinhardt, 176.

[55] However, Kitto [above, note 17], 137: "The play is a Comedy in the sense that wickedness is punished and virtue triumphs." Then Kitto admits that the wicked triumph too but asserts that the audience does not feel this (see above, p. 8 and note 18). But how can the audience' feeling fail to be influenced by its rational understanding of the facts of the play? Kitto emphasizes that the audience is witness to the confounding of Odysseus. But the fact is that there are two reversals: first Odysseus is frustrated, then when Philoctetes is about to be granted his wish to be taken home a *deus ex machina* puts him right back on the boat with Odysseus.

47), οὐδέν πω κακόν γ' ἀπώλετο, / ἀλλ' εὖ περιστέλλουσιν αὐτὰ δαίμονες.

(3) A third reason to believe that the play is more than a piece of social or political criticism is that during the course of the play Neoptolemus finds far more to arouse his moral concern than just the knavery of man.

We are told by Dio Chrysostom (52.15) that the introduction of Neoptolemus into the story of Philoctetes' return to the Greeks is Sophocles' own invention. Since Sophocles did invent Neoptolemus' presence on Odysseus' expedition he must have intended it to serve a definite artistic purpose, and a comparison of this play with what Dio tells us of the earlier versions of Aeschylus and Euripides makes it reasonably certain what that purpose was. Neoptolemus was not invented to fill a role of intermediary which was demanded by the received plot, for there was no such role in the earlier plays. Dio tells us (52.14) that Aeschylus' Odysseus arrived on Lemnos unaccompanied, and that Euripides' Odysseus was accompanied by Diomedes. Whatever Diomedes' function may have been, it was not to act as an intermediary for Odysseus, since Dio tells us that Euripides' Odysseus was disguised so as not to be recognized. In any case Diomedes would have been very inadequate for the role, linked by tradition as he is with Odysseus in character as well as in adventure. (As in this play; see lines 416-18, where Philoctetes says, But the offspring of Tydeus and the son of Sisyphus bought by Laertes will not be dead, for they should not be alive!) What Neoptolemus brings to the play that Diomedes could not is neutrality. He stands midway between the other two characters with their strong wills and clear certainty, entirely convinced by neither. He begins the play consenting, with grave reservations, to help Odysseus; he ends consenting, again against his better judgement, to help Philoctetes. Neoptolemus comes very close to playing the mythical role of "ideal spectator." He is a young man who intends good but who has never been really tested, and whose principles are not firmly established in his own mind. Thus he can see both the right and the wrong on both sides.

It probably is significant that the chorus plays a smaller role in this than in the other extant plays of Sophocles. I have no doubt that at least part of the reason for this is that Neoptolemus has usurped its function of sympathizer and confidant. And he provides a much more satisfactory measure of, and commentary upon, the

goodness and highmindedness of the hero than could the usual Greek chorus of feckless and fearful commoners, slave girls, or old men. In most Greek tragedies the chorus is debarred from action on the hero's exalted level, and to a greater or lesser degree the ethic of all choruses is the prudent one of the common man. The typical chorus provides a balance against the hero's extremism because it can see two sides to every question: the realistically practical as well as the noble. Neoptolemus shares this ability, but for a different reason (for, unlike a chorus, he is ambitious): that his moral character as yet is not entirely formed. However, he has a natural inclination to goodness (see, for instance, 79-80, 88-89, and 94-95). And as the son of Achilles he represents a much higher standard of ἀρετή than any chorus could. He has none of a chorus' overriding concern for prudence; he is moved by the same abstract sense of honor that enables Philoctetes to stand firm against Odysseus. In fact, he is induced to undertake the deception of Philoctetes by the prospect of future honor. But at the beginning his conception of the nature of honor still is unclear. He confuses it with fame, and rather uncomfortably allows himself to be persuaded that honor can coexist with shame. Thus he consents to do a deal with necessity—until Philoctetes' perseverance brings him to reject τὸ αἰσχρόν. Unlike a chorus, whose initiative is limited by its weakness and caution, he can act; that he fails through most of the play to take any decisive action is due to uncertainty rather than to weakness. And that he ultimately moves from Odysseus' side to Philoctetes' cannot be without significance.

In the prologue Neoptolemus does not question that Odysseus' purpose (as opposed to his methods), to take Philoctetes to Troy, is a good one. In fact, one can hardly see how he could question it, for he is told that Philoctetes' arrival at Troy will bring relief to the Greek army and is ordained by fate. But more, it will bring glory to Neoptolemus himself, since he will share in Troy's conquest. As Alt says, how could the son of Achilles fail to be responsive to the promise of honor?[56] Nevertheless, Neoptolemus' agreement is not without qualms. He is troubled by the doubt, which he suppresses for the time, that Odysseus' dishonorable methods will fatally compromise the honor that he hopes to attain. It has to be argued by those who interpret this as a political play

[56] Alt [above, note 15], 148.

that Neoptolemus' outlook does not essentially change in the course of the play, and that his better feelings, which are so visible in the prologue, merely come again to the surface. The argument must be, in other words, that he finally is overcome by scruples about Odysseus' methods only, and not by misgivings about the expedition's purpose, and he returns the bow simply because he has obtained it dishonestly. This is a plausible argument, for in the course of the play Neoptolemus certainly does not reject honor as a good; in fact, when he takes the bow back from Odysseus the first reason he gives for doing so is that he worsted Philoctetes ἀπάταισιν αἰσχραῖς ... καὶ δόλοις (1228).

However, there is a gap in this interpretation. Neoptolemus may believe that ensnaring Philoctetes by trickery is dishonorable, but in the prologue he is very far from doubting that it is a good thing. Moreover, before he returns the bow he already has abandoned deceit so far as it is possible for him to do so. He has found that he is unable to take Philoctetes on board ship without telling him the truth. So he does so (915-16), abandoning the method but not the purpose, for at this point he intends Philoctetes to come with him against his will. He tries being honest with Philoctetes and finds that this is not enough to allay his qualms. Therefore, some new factor has entered during the course of the play to influence his decision to return the bow. In his argument with Odysseus, just a few lines further on, he tells what it is. He repeats (1234), I have obtained the bow αἰσχρῶς, then adds, κοὐ δίκῃ. (This is in direct contradiction of his uneasy protest to the angry Philoctetes earlier in line 926 that he must keep the bow, distasteful as it is to him, because justice compels him to do so: τό τ' ἔνδικόν με καὶ τὸ συμφέρον ποιεῖ). The possibility that Neoptolemus comes to regard his mission as unjust is unthinkable, of course, the mission being associated as it is with the will of the gods. So that critics seemingly have given these words a very narrow interpretation, for no one has thought them worth much discussion. Consequently, Neoptolemus' motive for returning the bow has given critics great trouble.

The usual way out of the difficulty has been to assert that Neoptolemus becomes more concerned not about justice but about the gods' will. He comes to realize that the strategy of the mission has been wrongly conceived because the gods want Philoctetes to return to the Greeks willingly. If this is so Neoptolemus is remarkably reticent about saying it. He does not give as a reason

for his decision to return the bow, The gods do not want me to do this, but, It is shameful and unjust to do this. And the only information about the gods' will that Neoptolemus receives during the play which could lead him to this decision is contained in one phrase, which I discussed above (p. 26), πείσαντες λόγῳ (612), occurring long before Neoptolemus repudiates Odysseus.[57] Thereafter the need to persuade Philoctetes never is mentioned again, and if Sophocles wants us to believe that Neoptolemus' primary motive is to do the gods' will, his failure to develop the idea is inexplicable.[58] But if we overlook the lack of evidence that Neoptolemus' return of the bow is a pious act, there is nevertheless evidence in the play that actually contradicts the idea.

After Neoptolemus returns the bow he is persuaded to go yet one step further, and consents to take Philoctetes home. Even if Neoptolemus believes that the gods do not want Philoctetes to be forced by Odysseus' methods to go to Troy, he still most assuredly believes that the gods want Philoctetes to go to Troy. He tells us this precisely and at length after he returns Philoctetes' bow to him (1314-42). But he then consents to take Philoctetes in the opposite direction, to abet him in deliberate disobedience of the gods' will. There has been a strong critical tendency to disregard entirely Neoptolemus' consent to take Philoctetes back home as a separate decision from his decision to give back the bow; or at best to consider it a kind of unconsidered reflex of the frustration of failing in his mission.[59] Many critics talk rather vaguely of

[57] D. B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *CQ* n.s. 19 (1969), 47, points out that Greek oracles are notoriously unclear. Even when their end is clear the method of achieving that fulfillment often is a difficult problem. So that Odysseus' adoption of deceit in the service of persuasion is not in the circumstances unreasonable, and Neoptolemus has no way of suddenly being sure that Odysseus' way is not consistent with the oracle. The truth is that Neoptolemus is moved to return the bow by moral rather than religious considerations. As Robinson, 51, says, "Neoptolemus' virtue is something more than fidelity to oracles, Odysseus' vice is worse than neglect of oracles."

[58] What certain critics lack in evidence, however, they make up for in rhetoric. Bowra, writing in 1944, drags up the red herring of the problem of the moral conflict between obedience to a military superior and obedience to moral right. When Neoptolemus finally returns the bow this, he asserts, 298, is disobedience to Odysseus but "obedience to the gods." See also Adams [above, note 22], 154; Schlesinger [above, note 20], 118; Knox [above, note 20], 118-20.

[59] Bowra, 300, calls it an attempt to do "the second-best" thing, ignoring the fact that it excludes the possibility of the fulfillment in the future of the gods' will.

nobility and honor. "Neoptolemus," says Harsh, "finally agrees to take Philoctetes home not because he thinks that this is the right course, but merely because he is pressed so hard on a point of personal honor." [60] This will not work, for Greek honor is not mere *machismo*. However illogically a Greek hero may ignore practicality in his pursuit of a goal which he knows is not attainable, he never overlooks moral logic. His rigidity inevitably is based on a firm belief in the correctness of his course of action. When Neoptolemus consents to take Philoctetes home it is an act of great audacity, and he does it because he thinks it is the right thing to do. But he does not think that it is what the gods want. Any complete and consistent interpretation of the play must reconcile this contradiction.

At the beginning of the play Neoptolemus' willingness to do what the gods' oracle has ordained is unequivocal. In the prologue he is troubled by Odysseus' proposal. But as is to be expected of a young man and a son of Achilles, he is preoccupied with considerations of heroic honor; so that he is disturbed—at least consciously—only by the slyness of Odysseus' methods. It is not my nature, he says, to accomplish anything ἐκ τέχνης κακῆς (88). Moreover, he asserts (94-95), I would rather fail καλῶς δρῶν than be victorious κακῶς. However, at this point his own morality is a very simplistic one indeed. If you use overt, direct action to get what you want, then it is honest. He is willing, he says, to take Philoctetes πρὸς βίαν but μὴ δόλοισιν (90-91). And he adds naively (91-92), With only one foot he won't be able to best so many of us. It is difficult to believe that Sophocles did not intend, even this early in the play, to provoke a certain uneasiness about the justice of making Philoctetes go to Troy; to plant in the minds of his audience an unspoken doubt, Is the use of force, however καλόν, really more decent?

However, Neoptolemus soon shows that his moral sensibility is much finer than this. The reality of Philoctetes' torment confronts him with the bewildering fact that punishment may be visited upon an innocent man without cause. Happiness may not follow immediately on the footsteps of honesty, and there may not be a direct relationship between guilt and suffering. In his perplexity he rationalizes (191-200):

[60] Harsh [above, note 34], 411.

> This doesn't surprise me. These sufferings are from the gods (θεῖα) and came upon him from savage Chryse. And surely what he now bears he bears by the plan of one of the gods, so that he may not stretch his divine arrows against Troy before the time comes when Troy is fated to be conquered by them.

Surprisingly, this specious apology often is taken at face value. "Questo è il senso religioso della tragedia," says Perrotta.[61] The tragedy must therefore make little sense, for these lines do not solve any problem of cosmic or divine injustice. If they are true, this means that the gods must be not only callously brutal but clumsy and incompetent, who have to make a man suffer for nearly ten years as Philoctetes has in order to get him to Troy at the proper moment.[62] This explanation so clearly is desperately inadequate that, far from allaying any suspicions that the audience may have conceived about the gods' culpability, it rather calls the audience' attention to the question. The question of the gods' share of responsibility—whether the gods are good or bad in a world in which this kind of suffering can happen—might perfectly well have been avoided, as it is in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Instead, Sophocles voluntarily brings it forward near the beginning of the play. Neoptolemus reminds us not only that a divinity, Chryse, caused Philoctetes' wound but also that the gods have allowed him to suffer in lonely isolation for so many years without intervening, and suggests gratuitously that this has been in furtherance of some active intention. After this it seems to me that any spectator or reader must be conscious of the gods' role in the events with which the play is concerned; and that he must at the end be consciously satisfied or dissatisfied with the gods' dispensation in accordance with his interpretation of these events.

Kitto, as he would, sees the trap and denies that this is so. This problem, he says, is "... the most profound of problems, the problem of suffering and Divine Providence. Once raised, this problem must dominate the play. But it does not: it drops stone-dead." He then explains that Sophocles did not intend to raise the

[61] Perrotta [above, note 23], 414. Bowra, 290, rather desperately takes refuge in a legalistic theology: "Philoctetes has not sinned deliberately against the gods, but he has to suffer for breaking their rules."

[62] Kitto [above, note 17], 112. See also Linforth [above, note 16], 107-08.

question at all; that Neoptolemus merely is expressing his own disturbance about his mission. "He dislikes the idea that the men he is now serving are a set of unconscionable villains, and therefore he blames the gods—as many other characters do in Greek tragedy, always wrongly." [63] "Always wrongly" is a revealing phrase. I leave aside the fact that it is untrue, as Kitto himself would admit in a less heated moment. It betrays the *a priori* reasoning that so often surfaces in critical treatments of *Philoctetes*: Sophocles believes that the gods are good, therefore Sophocles cannot question the goodness of the gods.[64] Kitto says that Neoptolemus desperately blames the gods for something that they did not do. But this is just not so: τὰ παθήματα κεῖνα πρὸς αὐτὸν / τῆς ὠμόφρονος Χρύσης ἐπέβη, says Neoptolemus (193-94), which is the simple truth. It is true that men are partly to blame for Philoctetes' past sufferings; this play is no mere anti-religious treatise. But the gods bear a share of this responsibility, too, and the playwright takes care to draw this to our attention.[65] Moreover, it is even more wrong to say as Kitto

[63] Kitto, 112.

[64] To so many critics the benignity of the gods in Sophocles is simply axiomatic and requires no further demonstration. Schlesinger [above, note 20], 103, asserting like Kitto that it is not the gods but men who are wrong, is representative (here he is discussing the fact that Odysseus' plan comes to grief): "Es ist höchst unwahrscheinlich, dass Sophokles die Götter den Menschen etwas Unmögliches anbefehlen lässt. Nicht die göttliche Forderung ist absurd, sondern das was die Menschen daraus machen...." Why is it unwahrscheinlich? Harsh, 408-409, trying to convince that the ending of the play is good and what Philoctetes really wants, goes even further: "There can be no dichotomy ... between the ideal and the real ending or the divine and the human ending. Especially for the Greeks *the divine is an extension of the human* (emphasis mine)." What does this mean? That whatever the gods do for men must be good for them? Perrotta, 422, faces much more honestly the fact that Sophocles does, indeed, call into question the good will of the gods: "Il poeta pone, non risolve, il problema della giustizia degli dèi." But this disturbs Perrotta's Catholic sensibilities very much, and he asserts, 421, by way of qualification, "Il religiosissimo Sofocle non avrebbe certo pronunziate in suo nome le parole [blasfeme] che fa dire a Filottete." I'd be curious to know how a dramatic poet could put such questions in his own name. Finally, of course, Bowra, 263: "We can hardly believe that Sophocles intended our moral feelings to run counter to what is desired by the gods." A sort of piously meaningless statement intended to cut off further questioning.

[65] Alt [above, note 15], 174, believes that, in spite of the fact that there is no ultimate justification of the way Philoctetes has suffered, simply because the gods do take part in the affairs of men this play is not so pessimistic as the late plays of Euripides, such as *Orestes* and *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, in which you seem to have a dissolution of all order. Here the gods touch the affairs of men and their will gives order to the world, so that human life is not without

does that after this the problem of the gods' justice is dropped.

The plot of this play is a queer, turned-around one. The man who in the first scene assumes the role of villain sets out to drag the hero forcibly to what the audience has every reason to believe is "the good." He is unsuccessful, and the action moves further and further away from the known end, the conclusion that the audience knows must occur. As others have remarked, the audience must have been puzzled and uneasy. The expected conclusion is Philoctetes' salvation through the gods' grace. But the advantages that are to accrue to Philoctetes are not directly referred to at all until about line 720, almost halfway through the play, when, near the end of an ode describing his woes, the chorus says, After all this he will be great (719-20). Ignoring the impending grace of the gods, the early part of the play focuses on the past, and in particular on past injustices. Immediately after Neoptolemus raises (or, if you follow Kitto, fails to raise) the question of divine justice, Philoctetes appears. He soon learns that his visitors are Greeks, but claim never to have heard of him. His immediate reaction is to complain about the gods: Oh indeed, I am wretched and hated by the gods that no news of my situation reached home .... But those who sacrilegiously cast me out can keep silent and laugh, while my disease grows ever worse (254-59). Whether Sophocles intends for us to believe him or not, at least there can be no doubt that Philoctetes in his bitterness doubts the justice of the gods.

Since his visitors seem not to know him, Philoctetes continues the conversation with an anguished description of his painful suffering, and of the way he was abandoned on the island. In these lines Neoptolemus is told how callously the Atreidae and Odysseus deserted Philoctetes, and Philoctetes' anger is directed entirely toward them. He mentions the gods only once, but then in a significant way (314-16):

hope. It seems to me that the fact of the gods' order is a very faint consolation if the order is not a good one. What Alt ignores is that if the gods are to be given direct credit for the good they must be held to blame for the bad. As Pratt [above, note 21], 280, puts it, in a world in which the will of the gods is immanent, the moral issue is also a religious issue. (A curiosity worth noting is that Schadewaldt [above, note 1] says almost the same thing about Sophocles that Alt says about Euripides: that the Sophoclean hero, by comparison with the Homeric, suffers much more because he is cut off from divinity, while the Homeric hero never is alone in his suffering, 240.)

τοιαῦτ' 'Ατρεῖδαί μ' ἥ τ' 'Οδυσσέως βία,
ὦ παῖ, δεδράκασ' · οἷς 'Ολύμπιοι θεοὶ
δοῖέν ποτ' αὐτοῖς ἀντίποιν' ἐμοῦ παθεῖν.

Now, the audience knows that the gods are not about to punish Odysseus and the Atreidae but to reward them. And Philoctetes just has prompted us to doubt what the gods are about when they make the innocent suffer while the impious are allowed σῖγ' ἔχοντες γελᾶν. The conversation now turns from Philoctetes' suffering to news from Troy. Philoctetes learns that his friends Achilles, Ajax, and Patroclus are dead; Nestor has lost his son Antilochus. But those whom he hated or despised, Thersites, the Atreidae, Odysseus, and Diomedes are, in Neoptolemus' words, flourishing in the army of the Greeks (420). Finally, in his bitterness Philoctetes blurts (446-52):

> ... Nothing evil yet has perished but the gods care for them well, and somehow delight in turning the villains and knaves away from Hades; but always they send the just and good from life. How am I to reconcile these things, how praise when, praising things divine, I find the gods evil?

So much for Kitto's assertion that the problem of divine injustice "drops stone-dead."

At this point a plausible objection might be made to my emphasis on the doubts expressed in the play about the gods' justice. Briefly, this objection would be that Sophocles' gods are not unjust but un-just, or, as Cedric Whitman has put it, "supramoral." [66] I have tried to show that Sophocles is very far from being, as some would have him, a defender of the faith, but this has been shown before by people like Whitman, Kirkwood, and Schadewaldt, and it does not mean that Sophocles takes a hostile, or even an ironic, view of the gods. As Kirkwood says, "It is in the nature of deity, as Sophocles portrays deity, to permit suffering; but it does not follow that deity is cruel or unjust—the attitude that demands that deity attend to the worldly success of the good is not the highest type of religious thought." [67] Elsewhere in Kirkwood's book this argument, that in Sophocles the gods are impersonal but not

[66] Whitman [above, note 3], 245.
[67] Kirkwood [above, note 2], 176-77.

actively malicious, is discussed in more detail, and it is expressed in clearer outline than anywhere else I know. Kirkwood shows that in various places in various plays the idea is found that, "... deity is hostile to human endeavor, and if it takes account of man at all it does so only to knock him down, for no moral reason." [68] But on the pages that follow he shows that another group of statements culled from the plays says that the gods bring both good and bad; and still a third group that the gods are helpful and bring good.[69] From this he concludes that what is expressed in the mouths of Sophocles' characters is "... the inconclusive and heterogeneous group of attitudes characteristic of the archaic age, and still widely held in fifth century Athens .... It is a religious outlook in which the constant attribute of the gods is power." [70] Kirkwood adds that the dominant feeling of this religious outlook is one of fear,[71] but he insists that this should not be accepted naïvely as Sophocles' own religious attitude, and he argues that what happens in each of the plays, viewed as a whole, contradicts this attitude; that the plays depict the gods as generally on the side of justice.[72] However, he admits that the gods "... are impersonal, remote and indifferent to human suffering." He adds, "If we find this indifference unjust, then the gods are unjust." [73]

This neutral willingness of divinity to permit human suffering, if it correctly describes Sophocles' world-view, justifies Opstelten's description of Sophocles as pessimistic, but not the assertion I made earlier in this paper that in some of his plays his attitude is negative and disillusioned (see above, pp. 5-6). Kirkwood's "indifference" is that of impersonal forces, the forces of the universe which, relentless as they are and overwhelming as they are, do not reduce the hero to nothing, but allow him to retain his personal dignity. In fact it is with these forces, or with a situation to which they contribute, that the hero's idealism finds itself in conflict, and they provide a test in which his nobility of spirit manifests itself.[74] And Kirkwood believes that the hero's devotion to an ideal is such

[68] Kirkwood, 265.
[69] Kirkwood, 266-67.
[70] Kirkwood, 271.
[71] Kirkwood, 272.
[72] Kirkwood, 271-79.
[73] Kirkwood, 279.
[74] Kirkwood, 177: "The ideal [of the hero] ... [is] created out of the clash of heroic character and testing situation."

a strong compensating factor that it is wrong even to call Sophocles pessimistic. Thus Schadewaldt, whose article, "Sophokles und das Leid," is in substantial agreement with Kirkwood's treatment of this question, says that in his suffering a greater "Ernst" comes over the hero and he is refined—he becomes more himself (see above, p. 6 and note 13).[75] Now, whatever can be said of Philoctetes, it cannot be said that he has been refined by his suffering. He has been so degraded by the assaults made on his health, his security, and finally his self-respect, that in his bitter desperation he can cry out to Odysseus, in essence, Why do you come here now to persecute me, ὃς οὐδέν εἰμι (1030; these words are repeated in line 1217; see above, p. 23)? To both Kirkwood and Schadewaldt the distinctive element and the subject of real interest in Sophoclean drama is not the cruelty of the forces opposing the hero but the nobility of his conduct as he meets their challenge. In *Philoctetes*, on the contrary, the emphasis is on the cruelty; Philoctetes' response is no more than passive, a dogged effort to hold on to life and to some small shred of self-respect when he has lost all else; and even in this passive resistance he is not allowed to succeed.

* * *

The unspoken question asked by Neoptolemus' lame excuse for Philoctetes' past torments is, Why? If this is not an adequate reason, what *is* the meaning of it all? The same question is implicit in each of Philoctetes' complaints in the scene that follows (219-541); and it is explicit in his anguished exclamation at the climax of his tale of past woes (451-52; see above, p. 35): How can I praise the gods ... when I find them evil? The question simply hangs in the air unanswered, obviously because there is no answer: it was all meaningless. It is clear from Neoptolemus' subsequent behavior that this is the conclusion to which he comes. But if Neoptolemus is unable to justify the past, at any rate he can look with equanimity to the future when he will be instrumental in bringing to Philoctetes good in return for all the past evil.

The notion that the workings of universal forces, the gods and fate, are meaningless or beyond man's understanding is nothing new in Greek literature, of course. It is clearly to be seen both in

[75] Schadewaldt, 244.

Achilles' story of the urns of Zeus in book 24 of the *Iliad* and in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Hans Diller has argued that a basic theme running through all of Sophoclean drama is that of the insufficiency of human understanding.[76] It does not follow, however, that because human understanding is inadequate human aspirations are blameworthy. Witness Oedipus. And Diller believes that in Sophoclean drama doubts are in fact raised about the morality of the world-order that are not removed.[77] What keeps these doubts from monopolizing attention in such a tragic situation is concentration on the human participation.[78] Heroes of such plots are given scope of action to compass or cooperate in their own destruction, as do Achilles and Oedipus. Diller clearly believes that man's inadequate understanding in Sophoclean drama is another manifestation of the human predicament of high tragedy: man reaches high in order to manipulate the divine dispensation for the realization of his own ambitions, but miscalculates and fails.[79]

In *Philoctetes*, however, I argue that the principal character is distinguished by no ambition and cannot be thought in any way to be a cause of the disasters that have befallen him; that, in fact, every human action in the play proves to be feckless. What distinguishes this play from *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Antigone* is the element of control. Control here is almost completely out of the hands of mortals. The gods initiate the action, and in the end bring it to accomplishment. (This, incidentally, is one reason that some people feel that the play is episodic. There is little cause-and-effect relationship among events because (1) most of the human efforts in the play have no effect, or have an effect that is immediately reversed, and (2) two of the play's events have no definable cause, happening because of chance, fate, and/or divine intervention. But this episodic quality is not necessarily due to the play's being clumsily constructed. A sense of the causelessness of events and the futility of human endeavor—a sense of being imprisoned by forces beyond one's control or even rational prediction—is also characteristic of literary phenomena like the novels of Kafka or the comedy of the absurd, which have their roots in twentieth century existentialism.) In a play like this, in which everything is in the gods' control, the audience can accept with equanimity the proposition that the gods' solicitude for man's welfare is uncertain only if it has an abiding faith in the good intentions of the divine. Otherwise it will react, with Philoctetes, with a sense of frustration at the seeming irrationality of things. Bowra, along with others, argues that the Greeks of the fifth century have this kind of confidence in the gods which, to be sure, may be seen in some authors like Aeschylus and Pindar.[80] This assertion of general faith, however, seems very doubtful to me. One could marshall an impressive array of fifth-century doubts about the existence of divine justice or of divinity at all. It seems much more likely that popular belief was characterized by an "inconclusive and heterogeneous group of attitudes" which Kirkwood finds expressed in Sophocles' plays.[81] However, in the last analysis, the willingness of critics to overlook the importance of the doubts expressed by Philoctetes in the first scene is due to their knowledge, shared by Neoptolemus, that in the end the gods are going to put it all right.

But do they in fact put it all right? Neoptolemus believes to the end that Philoctetes would be better off if he would yield to the necessity placed upon him by the gods and accept the concomitant practical benefits. But at last he consents to an act of quixotic folly

[76] Diller [above, note 19], 20-21, says that in this play the theme is realized in Odysseus but not in Philoctetes.

[77] Diller, 10: "Im sophokleischen Drama wird das Geschehen in seiner Unertrinnbarkeit ohne Rest durchschaubar gemacht, nicht aber der Zweifel an der Gerechtigkeit oder der Moralität der Weltordnung, soweit er überhaupt ausgesprochen wird, erklärt."

[78] "Es gilt auch hier . . . dass Sophokles nichts daran liegt, das Geschehen in seinen Tragödien mit menschlichen Vorstellungen von Gerechtigkeit oder Moral, sei es positiv oder negativ, zu konfrontieren. Wohl aber liegt ihm daran, die eindeutige Klarheit der göttlichen Aussage gegenüber allem menschlichen Fehlwissen darzutun (Diller, 24)."

[79] Actually, Diller believes, 25, that in the later plays the hero's presumption of adequate knowledge is more specific; but in all the plays someone believes falsely that he can act successfully on the basis of his knowledge.

[80] Bowra, 285. Reinhardt [above, note 29], 200, who also believes that Philoctetes' doubts about divine justice derive from an insufficient view of things, quotes a passage from the Hippocratic *de victu* (1.11 = 22 C 1 Diels-Kranz) which contains many reminiscences of Heracleitus: "What the gods have ordered is eternally right, whether just or not." (Bowra, too, 284, quotes this passage. A similar idea is expressed in Heracleitus 22 B 102 Diels-Kranz: τῷ μὲν θεῷ καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἄνθρωποι δὲ ἃ μὲν ἄδικα ὑπειλήφασιν ἃ δὲ δίκαια.) The Heracleitean author, however, as my colleague Professor L. Shannon DuBose has pointed out to me, was speaking of a metaphysical "rightness," not one that refers to human concepts of moral justice. Quotation games of this sort can cut both ways, too. Heracleitus also says, 22 B 53 Diels-Kranz: "Strife is the father of all things". See also Heracleitus 22 A 22. I am grateful to Professor DuBose for discussing Heracleitus with me and referring me to these fragments.

[81] Kirkwood, 271.

which will attempt to accomplish the opposite of the gods' wish that Philoctetes go to Troy. Why does he do this? Clearly by the end of the play Neoptolemus has become convinced that Philoctetes' going to Troy at least is not an unqualified good. I believe that it is in the merchant-scene that Neoptolemus' change of heart begins to take place.[82] In this scene one of Odysseus' men appears disguised as a merchant and tells Philoctetes that Odysseus is coming to get him and take him back to Troy. The presumed purpose is to encourage Philoctetes to sail with Neoptolemus immediately. This scene, as has often been remarked, does not further the plot, for when the merchant appears Philoctetes already is on the point of departure. But one change does take place as the result of this scene: after it Neoptolemus seems reluctant rather than eager to leave the island. Kirkwood has pointed out that just before the merchant's appearance Neoptolemus seems to think the weather favorable (466-67) and appears to be ready to sail.[83] He urges Philoctetes to come at once (526). However, a little later when Philoctetes, in alarm at the news of Odysseus, wants to leave, Neoptolemus says that they must wait because the wind is adverse (640). It has been suggested that what changes Neoptolemus' mind is the phrase I have discussed before (p. 26), πείσαντες λόγῳ in line 612. Neoptolemus is reminded or learns that Philoctetes must be brought back by persuasion.[84] But the idea is unconvincing to me that Neoptolemus is prompted to a purely intellectual decision—to a judgement that their methodology is wrong—by one phrase in the middle of a highly emotional scene. I believe that a much more fundamental change takes place: during the scene Neoptolemus' confidence is shaken that Philoctetes' return to the Greeks will effect a happy ending. Linforth is much nearer the truth when he says that the merchant's speech solidifies Philoctetes' antagonism toward Odysseus.[85] The effect of the scene is to focus Philoctetes' attention, away from the injustices of the past, onto Odysseus' present purpose. It forces Neoptolemus to face the fact of Philoctetes' opposition to a return to Troy and his outrage at the idea of cooperation with Odysseus (see above, pp. 19-20). This is why Neoptolemus hesitates to board ship and implement the fraud: the present is too uncomfortably like the past.

[82] As does Alt [above, note 15], 156.
[83] Kirkwood, 59.
[84] Kirkwood, 81; Adams, 147. [85] Linforth [above, note 16], 118.

When I spoke above of Philoctetes' past suffering as meaningless, I meant that it could not be justified in terms of human morality. It happened suddenly and arbitrarily, without intelligible reason, and without regard for the man's wishes or his good. In the next scene we are shown dramatically how sudden and arbitrary, and how cruel, an attack of the disease can be. But the merchant-scene concentrates on the circumstances associated with Philoctetes' salvation, and the suspicion grows that it is to be just as meaningless as his past calamity. It is just as sudden and arbitrary. Why now after so many years? was the question nagging at Neoptolemus' brave assertion that the timing was all part of a god's plan (191-200). Now the salvation is seen to be absurdly inappropriate: Philoctetes again deceived, by the same man, whom he hates most in the world, constrained again to accept what he least wants (πεισθήσομαι γὰρ ὧδε κἀξ Ἅιδου θανὼν / πρὸς φῶς ἀνελθεῖν, 624-25).

This is why Neoptolemus hesitates to sail, and it is also the reason, when after his attack of illness Philoctetes again is able to embark, that Neoptolemus tells him the truth (915-16). He becomes convinced that Philoctetes must not again be treated like a thing; that his feelings must not again be utterly disregarded. Neoptolemus no longer defines the moral question as one of honest, direct action vs. guile. Neoptolemus, of course, does not approve of guile, but he also does not, after telling Philoctetes the truth, proceed to overpower him. He does set out tentatively to force Philoctetes to come with him but this effort is abortive and he does not return to it. Clearly he comes to the conclusion that simple honest force is not an appropriate way to deal with Philoctetes. As Pratt says, for Neoptolemus, "[t]he question of honesty has become the question of justice." [86] When later he takes the bow from Odysseus to return it to Philoctetes he says not only, I took it by treachery . . ., but, also, I took it οὐ δίκῃ (see above, p. 29). What matters to Neoptolemus now is the element of constraint, and after telling Philoctetes the truth he proceeds, until interrupted by Odysseus, to try to persuade him to come to Troy voluntarily (917-19):

[86] Pratt [above, note 21], 280. Other critics have seen that Neoptolemus' moral horizons widen during the course of the play. Knox [above, note 20], 138, says, "He has come to higher ideals of moral conduct than could have been expected of the boy who was averse to lying but ready to use superior force against a sick man." In the view of Maddalena, 249-51, Neoptolemus the boy morally comes of age during the course of the day.

Neoptolemus: μὴ στέναζε, πρὶν μάθῃς.
Philoctetes: ποῖον μάθημα; τί με νοεῖς δρᾶσαί ποτε;
Neoptolemus: σῶσαι κακοῦ μὲν πρῶτα τοῦδ' ....

If Philoctetes is to be returned by Odysseus as he was abandoned, at least Neoptolemus does not want it to be against his will. Philoctetes must have the consideration due to him as a man. And if he can persuade Philoctetes to consent to the rational, practical course of action, Neoptolemus can still hope for a happy ending.

When Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes the truth, Philoctetes demands that the bow be returned to him. This Neoptolemus refuses to do, saying (925-26),

τῶν γὰρ ἐν τέλει κλύειν
τὸ τ' ἔνδικόν με καὶ τὸ συμφέρον ποεῖ.

The coincidence of justice and expediency is a convenient thing to believe in, of course, and among other things Neoptolemus is making one more attempt to accommodate Odysseus' cynical practicality to his own idealism. But he still can reasonably hope for this happy coincidence. For at this point it is only the circumstances surrounding his mission to which Neoptolemus objects, not its purpose. He still has two strong reasons to believe that the return of Philoctetes to the Greek army will be an act of compensatory justice: at Troy (1) Philoctetes will win glory, and (2) he will be cured.

Both of these Philoctetes rejects. Neoptolemus is quickly relieved of any delusion that the possibility of winning renown among the Greeks is a compelling argument to Philoctetes (even though, in his last attempt to persuade Philoctetes, he does again make one half-hearted reference to it, ll. 1344-47). Odysseus appears, with his abrupt, contemptuous treatment of Philoctetes providing a dramatic illustration of what troubles Neoptolemus most about this mission: the Greeks' disregard of Philoctetes' wants and his dignity. Odysseus can hardly be bothered to argue with Philoctetes (1047-48, 1052-53):

πολλ' ἂν λέγειν ἔχοιμι πρὸς τὰ τοῦδ' ἔπη,
εἴ μοι παρείκοι. . . .
. . . . . .
νικᾶν γε μέντοι πανταχοῦ χρῄζων ἔφυν,
πλὴν ἐς σέ· νῦν δὲ σοί γ' ἑκὼν ἐκστήσομαι.

Victory is what counts, he says in essence, and what you think means less than nothing. Rather than trouble to persuade Philoctetes, he threatens him with an alternative that is no alternative. ἢν μὴ ἕρπῃς ἑκών (985), he says, I will take you under compulsion. Philoctetes' wants could not be of less account in Odysseus' eyes. Finally Odysseus abruptly turns and leaves, taking the bow with him, considering or pretending to consider the object more important than the man. Even if nothing more were said, Neoptolemus, and the audience, must realize that Philoctetes could not possibly have any desire for renown among men of whom such a man as Odysseus is a leader, or wish to serve alongside them. But the point is explicitly made. Odysseus makes one small effort to appeal to Philoctetes' ambition for glory (995-99):

Philoctetes: ἡμᾶς μὲν ὡς δούλους σαφῶς
πατὴρ ἄρ' ἐξέφυσεν οὐδ' ἐλευθέρους.
Odysseus: οὐκ, ἀλλ' ὁμοίους τοῖς ἀρίστοισιν, μεθ' ὧν
Τροίαν σ' ἐλεῖν δεῖ καὶ κατασκάψαι βίᾳ.
Philoctetes: οὐδέποτέ γ'· οὐδ' ἢν χρῇ με πᾶν παθεῖν κακόν.

Philoctetes does not consider these proposed companions to be "the best." As he has said, the best are all dead—Achilles, Ajax, Antilochus, Patroclus—and the survivors are the Atreidae, Odysseus, Thersites, and their ilk (341-452; see above, pp. 34-35). Philoctetes has no sense of fellow-feeling whatever with the Greeks who stand before Troy, neither a desire for their esteem nor a feeling of duty toward them. To him they are the enemy, who have spurned him and deserve of him hatred unto death (1200-02):

Philoctetes: ἐρρέτω Ἴλιον, οἵ θ' ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ
πάντες ὅσοι τόδ' ἔτλασαν ἐμοῦ ποδὸς
ἄρθρον ἀπῶσαι.

Philoctetes' revulsion from his former comrades seems all the stronger because of the strong need he manifests for friendship throughout the play. It is ironic in the extreme that the man on whose lips early in the play the word φίλος so often appears is brought utterly to reject the friendship available to him; while the self-centered Odysseus, who betrays no care for anything but success, is said by the bow's theft to have effected κοινὰν . . . ἐς φίλους ἀρωγάν (1145). The conflict within Philoctetes between his righteous hatred and his longing for companionship is best seen

in the kommos following Odysseus' departure with the bow (1081-1217). Here he alternately rejects the chorus' overtures and begs them not to leave him, until in desperation he turns to death as the only solution to the impasse (1204-17).

Almost all critics, even those who believe that his anger over his wrongs is fully justified, blame Philoctetes for this intransigence, which seems to be a sterile rejection of the present good out of anger over wrongs of the past. Even if he scorns honor from the Greeks at Troy, the choice of continued suffering when cure is possible, the rejection of a life of action and accomplishment in favor of death, appears to be nothing but futile perversity.[87] Neoptolemus' words during this last effort to win Philoctetes over lend a certain credence to this interpretation (1318-21; quoted above, p. 13):

> ὅσοι δ' ἑκουσίοισιν ἔγκεινται βλάβαις,
> ὥσπερ σύ, τούτοις οὔτε συγγνώμην ἔχειν
> δίκαιόν ἐστιν οὔτ' ἐποικτίρειν τινά.
> σὺ δ' ἠγρίωσαι.

Neoptolemus seems to be saying, You close your eyes to the good while you cling to the bad of the past, but he is not. He no longer believes, as he did, that the gods are compensating Philoctetes and he does not say so. He argues only that one must make the best of things: It is necessary for men to endure the τύχαι given to them by the gods (1316-17). And I know that these things are fated to come about (1336-42). To be sure he does mention the two advantages to be gained by acceptance—the cure and the winning of fame. But, as his subsequent consent to abet Philoctetes in his savagery shows, Neoptolemus does not believe that these are unalloyed goods which any sane man would choose (see above pp. 31 and 39). At this point he is playing the part of a realist, not an idealist; and when he later says to Philoctetes, ὦ τᾶν, διδάσκου

[87] For instance Knox, 140, says, "Philoctetes' stubbornness condemns him to inaction, to ineffective suffering; he clings to the mood of vengeful self-pity, which has been his comfort for ten lonely years, and plays the role of victim rather than hero." Harsh [above, note 34], 408: "Philoctetes' determination to sacrifice health and glory to vengeance is irrational and perverse."

Linforth [above, note 16], 148, and Fuqua [above, note 48], 187-89, are the only critics I know who have fully appreciated that Philoctetes' yielding would be a compromise of his integrity.

μὴ θρασύνεσθαι κακοῖς (1387), he is speaking the language of survival, not of honor.

The critics who blame Philoctetes for his persistent rejection of the gods' restoration of him to society would be right, and Neoptolemus' change of heart would be inexplicable, if all of the evil were in the past. The question whether the gods' compensation to Philoctetes is adequate or commensurate with his past suffering would be meaningless. Granted that it is true that Philoctetes has no interest in helping the Greeks at Troy or in winning renown among them; at any rate, to be returned to society and to be cured surely would be preferable to his grim struggle for existence on the desert island. It is surprising that Neoptolemus does not say to Philoctetes, Things have changed; your troubles are over, or something to this effect. Instead he says, We have to make the best of what the gods impose upon us. Perhaps he already is beginning to see, even before Philoctetes' reply, that things really have not changed all that much.

The "plot of persecution," as I have called it, is common enough in the modern cinema, as well as in other forms of melodrama, where there often is a reversal at the end, the hero saved, the villains punished, and the audience' faith in the goodness of things restored. It may seem that in this play things are thus set right in the end. However, Philoctetes himself does not think so. He resists "salvation" almost to the last extremity. Perhaps this stubborn defiance is mere irrational hatred, conditioned by his long suffering. But his answer of refusal to Neoptolemus is quite cogent and to the point. Is this benefit you are talking about a benefit to me or to the Atreidae? he asks (1384). This is a crucial point, and one which to my knowledge has been entirely ignored by critics. Villainy is not punished in this play but rewarded. Philoctetes is being taken to Troy so that he may bring succour and and eventually triumph to those who nine years before so cold-bloodedly abandoned him to torment. Earlier in the play (446-52) Philoctetes complained bitterly that the gods seem to take special care of villains, and he concluded with the question (451-52; see above, p. 35), How can I praise the gods . . . when I find them evil? Nevertheless, despite the bitter resentment to which his experience forces him, Philoctetes is no Capaneus, and he cannot bring himself to believe, even when assured by Neoptolemus, that the gods could really will anything so unfair. Aren't you ashamed before the gods to

say such things? he asks Neoptolemus (1382). However, Neoptolemus, and we the audience, since we know the myth, know that this is precisely what the gods have decreed; and it is difficult to see how we can escape the conclusion that the gods' concern for justice is at best nonchalant.

Still, Philoctetes will be saved. It may be true that the gods' dispensation of justice is capricious, and that they are continuing to "take excellent care of the wicked" (see line 447). Nevertheless, it may seem that so far as Philoctetes is directly and personally affected the play does provide a reversal of misfortune. The gods will cure his foot and return him to the society of men that he so poignantly desires. To be sure this is a bare half-step toward a just order of things. But, as Neoptolemus has told him, you have to accept the evils of life and take the good wherever you can find it. If the return to the Greek army will profit Philoctetes, what is his refusal but a self-righteous and self-defeating insistence upon having all or nothing?

It should be perfectly clear that Philoctetes is willing to accept a great deal less than all. He asks only to be returned to his homeland and his father. He wants nothing more than to forget about Troy and the Greek army forever. He is willing to live with his wound and to forego all thought of vengeance upon Odysseus and the Atreidae, much as he desires it. If he never shows any interest in or entertains any hope of the possibility of a cure, it is because it will bring more bad than good.[88] When he goes to Troy his physical suffering will be relieved, but the worse wound to his self-respect will be too much to bear. At Troy he will not just be returned to the fellowship of men, but to a special company—that of his tormentors. He is being impressed against his will into a fellowship that is totally repugnant to him. Neoptolemus sums up Philoctetes' attitude toward these men in a statement early in the play; it is a statement that is disingenuous but one which Philoctetes takes at face value and with which he implicitly agrees (454-58):

> τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη τηλόθεν τό τ' Ἴλιον
> καὶ τοὺς Ἀτρείδας εἰσορῶν φυλάξομαι·

[88] Indeed, earlier in the play, before he has been told of his destined cure, he mentions it as a hypothetical possibility and says that vengeance is more important to him: εἰ δ' ἴδοιμ' ὀλωλότας / τούτους, δοκοῖμ' ἂν τῆς νόσου πεφευγέναι (1043-44).

> ὅπου θ' ὁ χείρων τἀγαθοῦ μεῖζον σθένει
> κἀποφθίνει τὰ χρηστὰ χὠ δειλὸς κρατεῖ,
> τούτους ἐγὼ τοὺς ἄνδρας οὐ στέρξω ποτέ.

How does a man vindicate his self-respect, in what terms does he explain himself to himself when he consents to become part of an order of things in which a man like Odysseus becomes a success, a pious man, a favorite of the gods? How does he acquire success himself and respect from others? By outdoing them in ruthlessness and cynicism? No, says Philoctetes to Neoptolemus, Let us repudiate these evil men, κοὐ κακοὺς ἐπωφελῶν / δόξεις ὁμοῖος τοῖς κακοῖς πεφυκέναι (1371-72). In particular, what character does a man have who, for the sake of expediency, will ignore the harm done to him by his worst enemy and fight by the enemy's side? Philoctetes says to Neoptolemus (1362-67):

> I wonder at this in you. For you should never yourself have gone to Troy .... These men outraged you, stealing your father's prize of honor from you. Will you then fight as their ally and force me to do this?

Something more humiliating is demanded of Philoctetes than that he abandon merely abstract and impersonal notions of right and wrong. He is asked in effect to embrace his enemies. He must return to Troy on their terms, to accomplish an end that they desire, not he. He must deny the validity of his own feelings of outrage and renounce all claim to justice. This is very near to the ultimate degradation. Eyes of mine, he says (1354-57), having seen all these things (his wrongs) how can you endure to see me consorting with these sons of Atreus, who have destroyed me, or the damned son of Laertes?

And so Neoptolemus consents to take Philoctetes home, in conscious defiance of the gods' will. Because even after having suffered so much, and having been brought so low, even in the face of death Philoctetes holds on to his last ounce of dignity. And because the justice of the gods is a tawdry thing, indiscriminately punishing the good and rewarding the evil. Only in Philoctetes does Neoptolemus believe himself to have found unwavering devotion to principle. It is to this that he responds, and in consenting to return Philoctetes to his homeland he determines to break the pattern of the past: for the first time in almost ten years some-

thing will be done that Philoctetes wants. Philoctetes' past deprivation has so humbled him that he is convinced that his personal wishes are of little value; they have been of little concern to others (see above, pp. 16-18). But his return to the Greek army—heaven's purpose—will require of him even further effacement: the relinquishment of his most deeply-held feelings and convictions. However, he is not brought so low that he cannot steadfastly resist this final surrender of his human dignity. And Neoptolemus' response is an acknowledgement of his successful defense of his status as a volitional creature.

* * *

I should say, almost successful. For now I refer, of course, to the *deus ex machina*. Those who have argued that *Philoctetes* is not a tragedy have been right, but this is not because it has a happy ending.[89] Only the reprobates have reason to rejoice, and when for the first time Philoctetes is about to get what he wants, or what he is willing to settle for from life, suddenly it is snatched from him. The ingredients of tragedy are there. Neoptolemus' decision, if carried to accomplishment, would be the classic tragic decision: he makes a moral choice to commit an act in full knowledge that it is directly contrary to the decree of the gods (not to mention the fact that it is tantamount to a renunciation of his own chance for fame and glory). Without the *deus ex machina* to save them from themselves Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are about to embark on a collision course with the forces governing the universe. It is an act that is ennobling because of its very desperation. What denatures the tragedy at its crisis is that Philoctetes' defiance of the gods is

[89] Kott [above, note 41], 181, says that the ending is unhappy but he does not remark upon the bitter irony of Philoctetes' reversal. Nor does he think that the words of the *deus ex machina* are, as I have argued, irrelevant to the preceding action. Philoctetes is an archetype of man's suffering, marked for this role by actively malignant gods (168, 181) and by historical necessity (170, 172, 183). It is of suffering that Heracles speaks (181). The *ex machina* ending seems not to be a surprise to the audience or a shock to its expectations, but to provide a kind of inevitable climax of the play's bleak pessimism. For the gods are destroyers (168, 172) who, in Kott's scheme of things, use those chosen by them as the agents of their destruction as well as their victims. Thus the suffering in question is not only that experienced by Philoctetes in the past but the suffering of Troy, which symbolizes the violence continually suffered by mankind (181-83). So Kott says, but he points to no evidence of such pacifist concern for Troy's well-being. See my remarks in note 41 on the bias of Kott's interpretation.

not so conscious or so determined as Neoptolemus thinks it. Philoctetes, in spite of all assurances, does not really believe that it can be true that the gods want anything so unjust as his return to Odysseus and the Atreidae.[90] Philoctetes may think that no force on earth can make him go to Troy against his wishes—and he seems willing to face the alternative of death by starvation—but when confronted with inescapable direct evidence of the gods' will he has not the moral strength to resist. And why should he? He is only a man. Nevertheless, in what light does this cast his brave words (1197-99), Never, never [will I come], not if Zeus should threaten me with his thunderbolt? Sophocles is not making of Philoctetes an empty poseur, a burlesque figure. When he says these words Philoctetes means them with the highest seriousness, and in their context they are both dramatic and awesome. Even so, they lend to his later quick acceptance of Zeus' orders a grim irony, and it is an irony that recognizes the true ratio of man's strength to the gods'.

The *deus ex machina*, far from being anticlimactic or "external" to the drama, is its logical conclusion. The play emphasizes Philoctetes' suffering, his humiliation, and his helpless ineffectuality. The *deus* not only imposes on him a necessity so degrading that he considers it worse than death; it demands and receives an implicit obedience that mocks his earlier unyielding defiance. And in an even more significant way the *deus* confirms Philoctetes in his futility and provides an appropriate conclusion. Early in the play Philoctetes suffers intensely and despairs of the possibility of physical salvation, but he is able to take comfort at least in his

[90] When Odysseus says to him, This is the will of Zeus and I am only his servant (989-990), Philoctetes answers, You hateful creature, what lies you invent. Pleading the authority of the gods you make the gods out liars (991-92). Philoctetes does indeed believe that perhaps the gods have imposed upon the Greeks a need for him; but he believes, as the following words to Odysseus show, that it is a need that the gods will allow to go unsatisfied (1035-42):

> You will perish for having wronged me if the gods have a concern for justice. And I know that they do, since never would you have sailed on this mission for one so wretched unless a divine goad were driving you. But oh fatherland and gods who watch over us punish them all . . . .

Later he says to Neoptolemus who tells him of the god's will (1382; see above, p. 45), Aren't you ashamed before the gods to say such things? Neoptolemus is not ashamed because he is telling the simple truth, as everyone but Philoctetes knows.

righteous hatred. If Odysseus continues to be successful, at least his actions have branded him a worthless rogue worthy of the scorn of honorable men like Philoctetes himself. The play is full of expressions of metaphysical uncertainty. Why should the gods have allowed Philoctetes to suffer so? Why should the gods have allowed the good to perish on the battlefield and the evil to survive and prosper? These doubts about the existence of the gods' justice seem confirmed when Philoctetes' bow is taken from him and he is abandoned, as he thinks, to die. Surely knavery again is on the point of triumph. Nevertheless, Philoctetes' moral firmness never wavers; and the sense of angry disillusion which the audience feels at this point must surely be tempered by admiration, as well as by the reassurance that the existence of moral order in the world is not entirely to be despaired of. If there is no cosmic justice at least there is hope in man, who can defend his own values. For a short while Philoctetes raises himself above the status of victim. When the gods require him to renounce his hatred and to reward those whom he knows to be evil, what they require is a renunciation of his last comfort, his claim to righteousness. If, when the gods ordered him to go to Troy, they thought worthy to indicate to him a Transcendent Reason—a reason which he had not taken into consideration, which superseded his objections—he still would be forced to embrace his despised enemies, but his consciousness of doing the right thing would survive intact to compensate him for his humiliation. But the gods do not even condescend to reason with him. The *deus* offers him nothing more than the two rewards, (1) You will be healed, and (2) You will win glory among the Greeks, which he has rejected before.

Philoctetes' reasons for refusing to go to Troy and his desperate defense of his moral position must—for I believe that this is a successful play—engage the audience' most intense interest and sympathy. But his objections fail to engage the gods' interest at all. The gods ignore the action on the human plane as casually as if it had never happened. The last five lines (1440-44) of Heracles' speech are an adjuration to piety, but it is difficult to see how the *deus ex machina* can have inspired any piety even in a contemporary audience. The gods' complete lack of concern for what Philoctetes thinks, for his moral outrage and his anguish, shows clearly that they have no concern for him except as an instrument of the destiny that they have decreed. And to the extent that the men observing

this play participate vicariously in Philoctetes' experiences, the gods' summary disregard of Philoctetes' needs becomes a disregard of their own. The sudden reversal of events demanded by the *deus* and Philoctetes' ready acceptance disappoint their emotional expectations. Philoctetes' failure becomes a paradigm of the frustration and futility of mankind.

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Disabled Veterans in History

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Ann Arbor

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS

2000 (2003 ed.)

During the voyage, he receives an injury to his foot by snakebite, according to most variations of the tale. The wound becomes infected, and Philoctetes is abandoned on the deserted island of Lemnos by his comrades, because they can bear neither the stench of the wound nor Philoctetes' screams of pain. Philoctetes remains on the island for nine years, in agony from this wound, which will not heal. Equipped with only his bow and arrows, he lives a miserable life foraging for food and searching for relief from his pain. Meanwhile, the Greeks learn that they will never be able to take Troy without the arrows of Heracles. Philoctetes and his weapons are fetched; the healers at Troy cure Philoctetes' wound. Troy falls, after which he returns to his native Thessaly.

Historical Interpretation

The narrative of the wounded soldier, then, is a very old one, and this particular narrative shows surprising resiliency. Of over 100 Sophoclean plays, *Philoctetes* is one of the seven that survive in their entirety. Furthermore, elements of the narrative have been adapted and interpreted over several centuries. In addition to the depiction of Philoctetes in art, the essence of the story survives through literary reworkings, most recently in Mark Merlis's *An Arrow's Flight,* a novel that weaves twentieth-century gay culture with the tale of Troy.[3]

From both an ancient and a modern perspective, the story of Philoctetes consists of elements that suggest attraction to and admiration for the wounded hero. The attraction is reflected in the artistic depictions of the sanitized and idealized agony of Philoctetes, such as is seen in figure 1. But there is also repulsion, reflected in the stench of Philoctetes' wound and his howls of pain, and rooted in the fear that nondisabled people have for disability. Pity, too, is expressed for Philoctetes by other characters in the play, such as Neoptolemus, who has come to lure Philoctetes and his weapons to Troy:

> I am filled with pity,
> Searing pity for this man,
> As I have been all along.
>
> (965–66)

The tale of Philoctetes is often discussed in mythological terms. Edmund Wilson, for example, in his essay "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," compares Philoctetes' wound with Oedipus's transgressions.[4] Both Philoctetes and Oedipus are pariahs; Philoctetes is an outcast because of his disgusting wound, Oedipus because of his dreadful sins.[5]

FIG. 1 Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *Philoctetes* (1807). (Reprinted by permission, The Museo de Arte de Ponce, The Louis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc., Ponce, Puerto Rico.)

While rich in timeless mythological symbolism, the story of Philoctetes is ahistorical in detail. The tale is also ahistorical in that it is heroic in proportion, rather than a depiction of ordinary people. Motifs such as Philoctetes' wound that seem obvious in their symbolism must be treated with caution. While it might be tempting for a modern audience to see Philoctetes' individual, physical suffering as symbolic of a larger, social suf-

Ah, it's going through me,
It's going through me!
Oh, what misery!
Yes, lost, my boy—this pain's devouring me.
For God's sake,
If you have a sword to hand, lad,
Strike my foot—here on the heel!
Mow it off, quickly!
Never mind my life!
Quick, quick, my boy!

(743–50)

This wound of heroic proportions reflects a more humble historical reality, that of the vulnerability of a citizen-soldier to incapacity for future battle from significant physical disability caused by a battle wound.

Neither during battle nor after was there an organized method of treating the wounded. Because of the intense, close range in classical Greek battle, which was fought shoulder-to-shoulder with one's comrades and face-to-face with one's enemies, there was no opportunity to gather one's own wounded during battle, and the enemy wounded were most likely killed or left to die.[14] These wounded were more pitiable than the dead. Thucydides (7.75) describes the wrenching scene at the disaster of Syracuse, which had occurred a few years prior to the production of the *Philoctetes:*

> The dead lay unburied, and each man as he recognized a friend among them shuddered with grief and horror; while the living whom they were leaving behind, wounded or sick, were to the living far more shocking than the dead, and more to be pitied than those who perished. These fell to entreating and bewailing until their friends knew not what to do, begging them to take them and loudly calling to each individual comrade or relative whom they could see, hanging upon the necks of their tent-fellow in the act of departure, and following as far as they could, and when their bodily strength failed them, calling again and again upon heaven and shrieking aloud as they were left behind.[15]

The stench of Philoctetes' wound suggests the stench of the dead and dying soldiers left on the battlefield, where, in the hot Greek summers, when battles were fought, corpses would be putrefying within a few hours.[16] The phenomenon of rotting corpses appears in ancient accounts of warfare often enough to suggest that it was perceived as a standard result of warfare.[17] However, there is no suggestion that the wounded veteran was also perceived as a standard result of warfare.

There were no medical units attached to the army—indeed, rational medicine, as opposed to medicine dependent upon divine intervention, was in its infancy in classical Greece. Still, one soldier could attend another, as the famous vase painting of Achilles tending Patroclos suggests.

Medical Care after Battle

If a wounded man survived the battle, he returned home and hoped for the best. There were no hospitals, and certainly no equivalent of the rehabilitation unit. Permanent physical disability did not belong in the domain of rational medicine; in fact, a Hippocratic practitioner's recognition of an incurable case—a case in which he should not intervene—was part of his art.[18] The abandonment of Philoctetes by his comrades must have resonated with any soldier in the Greek world who had transported an injured comrade home, knowing that the wounded soldier might not join the next military engagement.

Men with severe wounds would have been left for dead on the battlefield,[19] but less-severely injured men who became permanently physically handicapped as a result of war wounds must have been numerous.[20] Even a simple injury by today's standards, such as a fall, could have irreversible consequences in the ancient world. Herodotus (3.129–30) tells us that the Persian king Darius, having dislocated his foot in the process of dismounting from his horse, lay in pain for several days. Finally a Greek physician was fetched, who was able to ease Darius's pain. Still, Darius gave up hope of ever using the foot again, and this despite having the best doctors. This passage is not a straightforward testimony, of course, but rather a showcase for the art of Greek medicine: only the Greek doctors could stop the pain.[21] Nevertheless, the underlying basis of the tale—that one risked permanent disability from a relatively minor accident—had to ring true with Greek audiences.

From the Homeric writings on, war injuries were noted as causes of permanent physical handicaps. In the *Iliad,* the god of war himself, Ares, reflects that he risked dying or living "strengthless by reason of the smitings of the spear" (*Iliad* 5.887), and an ancient Greek audience would know that Eurypylus, limping back from the battlefield with a wound in his thigh, was in serious danger (*Iliad* 11.809–11). An injury to the femur, the largest bone in the body, leads to complications such as torn muscles and long-lasting infections.[22] The author of the Hippocratic treatise on dislocations and

practiced during the classical period. In the Hippocratic Corpus, amputation is always a passive matter; that is, the limb falls off on its own, or is pulled off only when it is ready to come away anyway.[34]

Philoctetes spent 10 years on an island fending for himself, deep in his agony of pain and solitude. The chorus laments the pitiful situation:

> He has no friend to nurse him, not a man.
> He sees no other face,
> He must be wretched, always alone, sick and in pain.
> He must go nearly mad,
> Wondering how to cater for his daily needs.
> How does a man endure such hardships?
>
> (171–76)

An ordinary wounded Greek soldier would be with his family, for physical care for an ordinary handicapped person was a family matter.[35] Still, Philoctetes' bare survival on the island of Lemnos provides symbolic parallels to the ordinary injured veteran's life. The economics of chronic disability suggest that all but the wealthiest of families would have been burdened; thus the quality of life for a significantly disabled veteran could not have been optimal.[36] As mentioned above, the disabled soldier, along with anyone who was unable to support himself, may have been eligible to receive a very small payment from the state, but only if he were destitute.[37] We can only guess at the range of conditions that must have existed for physically handicapped people who required care, for we do not have any direct information. The surviving literature shows us examples only of the extremes of children's solicitousness and neglect for their incapacitated parents.[38]

The Philoctetes myth highlights the lack of standardization in several areas of ancient Greek military life, including weaponry, medical care in battle, care for the wounded soldier after battle, and provision for the disabled veteran thereafter. In addition, because there was no category of "disabled veteran" and no custom of valorizing men wounded in battle, the myth highlights the dual reaction of admiration and disgust for the disabled soldier. In the twentieth-century Western worldview, there is an emotional and institutional category for the disabled veteran of war that did not exist in the ancient Greek world. This lack of standardization in the Greek world is a central consideration in an investigation of the ancient disabled veteran of war.

Absence of the Category of Disabled Veteran

When it became clear that his arrows were needed to win the Trojan War, Philoctetes' former comrades were apparently able to bear Philoctetes' cries and stench after all. He was retrieved from Lemnos and taken forcibly to Troy, asking his captor,

> How is it, cursed wretch, I am not *now* lame, evil-smelling?
>
> (1031)

We see the flexibility of the category "able" in our own century: during World War II, people who had been considered incapable by nature, such as women and people with mental retardation, suddenly were deemed quite capable. Intelligence tests that would have labeled a potential soldier mentally retarded, thus unfit for service, were discarded in favor of simple screening processes. Steven Gelb reports that "many previously institutionalized soldiers compiled war records that caused the attitude of institution superintendents to shift from one of disapproval and skepticism to pride in the accomplishments of 'their boys.'"[39]

This phenomenon is documented in the ancient Greek world as well. The same people who were deemed useless by nature of their physical configuration (whether by age, gender, or ability) were, in emergency situations, employed to defend the city walls.[40] There was not so rigid a distinction as there is today between those who were fit to serve and those who were not. One did not have to be in near-perfect bodily condition to serve. In classical Greek hoplite battle, one needed to be able to hold one's ground in order to keep the line intact, not to run or move quickly.[41]

At the end of the Sophoclean play (1438–39) Philoctetes is promised a cure by the healing god Asclepius after nine years of intense suffering. While this cure is on one level the play's final divine intervention,[42] the symbolism reflects reality. Philoctetes' cure is not the only tale of complete recovery. While rational Hippocratic physicians recognized incurable cases, the Asclepiadic dedications at Epidaurus include many testimonies of miraculous cures of blindness, deafness, lameness, and so on.[43] Given the perceived possibility for spontaneous, miraculous cure, the concept of disability's permanence in the ancient Greek world was much less rigid than today in the developed world. The Greeks could certainly hope for, if not expect, an imminent cure for any ailment, including ailments we in the modern world would call incurable. An example similar to Philoctetes' miraculous cure is

nothing is identified securely. The corpus also includes writings by the students of Hippocrates and other medical writers.

24. Srboljub Živanović, *Ancient Diseases: The Elements of Paleopathology,* trans. L. Edwards (New York: Pica Press, 1982), 171–72, writes that "the morphological deformities that arose are really beyond imagination at the present time." Maciej Henneberg and Renata Henneberg, "Biological Characteristics of the Population Based on Analysis of Skeletal Remains," in *The Chora of Metaponto: The Necropoleis,* ed. Joseph Coleman Carter, vol. 2 (Austin, Tex.: Institute of Classical Archaeology, 1998), 527, report that "despite the often fragmentary state of preservation which precludes observation of all possible sites of pathological processes on many skeletons, over 40% of the individuals showed some bone pathologies."

25. Paul Janssens, *Paleopathology: Diseases and Injuries of Prehistoric Man,* trans. I. Dequeecker (London: John Baker, 1970), 32–33; Donald Ortner and Walter Putschar, *Identification of Pathological Conditions in Human Skeletal Remains,* Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology 28 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 64. Lawrence Angel, "Ancient Skeletons from Asine," in S. Dietz, *General Stratigraphical Analysis and Architectural Remains,* Asine II: Results of Excavations East of the Acropolis, 1970–1974 (Stockholm: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1982), 109 notes, for example, the evidence in a male from the Middle Bronze Age of a right humerus fracture with 15 degrees angulation and shortening of the bone; in another male from the Protogeometric period, a fracture of the left tibia shaft with 5 degrees angulation and shortening; and, in a male from the Hellenistic period, a fracture of the left femur angled 20 degrees and thickened.

26. Majno, *The Healing Hand,* 188–89, discusses dangerous ancient medical practices in general; see also Lawrence Bliquez, "Greek and Roman Medicine," *Archaeology* 34 (1981): 10–17.

27. Ortner and Putschar, *Identification of Pathological Conditions,* 65, explain that in both small and large fractures, the sensory nerve may be lost, in which case the lack of pain allows continued use of the broken bone, which of course prevents healing.

28. Actually, Ortner and Putschar, ibid., 63, estimate six weeks, in ideal conditions, for the primary callus to develop, which suggests that the Hippocratic doctors' underestimation of the time needed for healing would result in permanent injury.

29. Živanović, *Ancient Diseases,* 176.

30. Colin Hodgkinson, *Best Foot Forward: The Autobiography of Colin Hodgkinson* (London: Odhams Press, 1957), 80–85.

31. Živanović, *Ancient Diseases,* 177–78.

32. Živanović, ibid., 128, discusses gangrene in the ancient world.

33. John Bergan and James Yao, "Performance of Debridement and Minor Amputation in Patients With Ischemia," in *Gangrene and Severe Ischemia of the Lower Extremities,* ed. J. Bergan and J. Yao (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1978), 403.

34. We learn the details of when and how the necrotic bones might fall off from Hippocratic writers: for example, we learn in *On Fractures* 33 that "the more porous bones come away more quickly, the more solid more slowly." Similarly, *Prognostic* 9: if the fingers and feet are blackened, the patient will lose the blackened parts. It is difficult to determine exactly when amputation became a medical practice; it could have existed all along as a sort of barbershop service.

35. Garland, *Eye of the Beholder,* 30.

36. Garland, ibid., points out that while the very rich might employ a staff of slaves, this would be the exception.

37. Arthur Hands, *Charity and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), 17–18, discusses the difference between charities as institutions that exist in their own right and the charity of the classical city-state, which had no legal personality and which was a matter of individual arrangements.

38. For literary examples, see Edwards, "Constructions of Physical Disability," 41.

39. Steven Gelb, "'Mental Deficients' Fighting Fascism: The Unplanned Normalization of World War II," paper presented at Cheiron Conference, June 1989, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, 4. See also Gelb, "The Problem of Typological Thinking in Mental Retardation," *Mental Retardation* 35, no. 6 (1997): 448–57.

40. Barry Baldwin, "Medical Grounds for Exemption from Military Service at Athens," *Classical Philology* 62 (1967): 42–43.

41. Hanson, *Western Way of War,* 95; also see Edwards, "Constructions of Physical Disability," 39–41.

42. Martin, "Metaphysical Realism in *Philoctetes,*" 137.

43. These testimonies are collected and translated by Emma Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimony,* 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945).

44. Ibid., 1:236.

45. A. H. Jackson, "Hoplites and the Gods: The Dedication of Captured Arms and Armor," in Hanson, *Hoplites,* 235.

appearance and a partial or complete loss of function and/or earning power and economic self-sufficiency. When especially severe, moreover, disabilities and disfigurements become a particularly significant marker for an individual's or group's social identity and self-understanding.[2] Especially traumatic, visible injuries have tended to become the primary way in which the general population of disabled veterans often seems to have been conceived in the minds of experts, artists, and the general citizenry. In much of the rehabilitation and medical literature about, and the cultural representations of, disabled veterans of the two world wars, we find amputees garnering attention vastly out of proportion to their relatively small numbers, and in effect, becoming representative of all disabled veterans.[3] The drama of their injury crowds out everything else about them, and about others, with different, less visible injuries or illnesses.

Awareness of the presence of disabled veterans in Western societies runs continuously, if mostly in muted forms, from ancient texts to the present. But that awareness has greatly grown, alongside the significant growth of their numbers, in the last two centuries, and particularly in the twentieth. The growth in numbers reflects the increasingly massive mobilizations of conscripted citizens by the nation-state to fight modern wars and the increasingly lethal potentialities of modern weaponry. It also reflects both a long, accelerating list of breakthroughs in such areas of general and military medicine as wound ballistics, vascular surgery, anesthesia, infection, and tropical disease, and the creation of systems for the delivery of medical services to frontline troops and for the evacuation of fighting forces to rear positions for intensive treatment.[4] One dramatic consequence of these developments may be seen in the stunning reversal of mortality rates for those men sustaining spinal cord injuries, and hence prone to deadly urinary tract infections, in twentieth-century conflicts. In World War I, only 20 percent of the Canadians and Americans with spinal cord injuries survived to be repatriated in North America; in World War II, largely because of the use of antibiotics, the figure was more than reversed, so that approximately 90 percent survived to return. Of *all* repatriated World War I injured survivors, 61 percent died in hospitals within two months of their return. In contrast, British, Canadian, and American data from World War II showed mortality rates of the repatriated cut to between 2.2 percent and 7.8 percent.[5] Sixty thousand Americans, Canadians and British, it is estimated, survived World War II hospitalization who would have died in World War I.[6]

Our growing awareness of the disabled veteran also results from the greater normalization of his existence. In the distant past, many disabled veterans were pauperized, roleless, and utterly dependent, and they were

reduced to street begging, to residence in poorhouses and monasteries, or to thievery, while often also sentimentally lionized in the abstract as heroes. In the twentieth century, disabled veterans became a major project of the modern state, which endowed them with recognition as a group worthy of continuing assistance, and with entitlements in the form of advanced medical care and prosthetics, pension schemes, vocational rehabilitation, and job placement. Alongside this state assistance, activism by disabled veterans in behalf of enhancement of this special provision and of their right to a normalized existence contributed to the nearly complete social reintegration of even the most severely disabled men, such as bilateral limb amputees, the blinded, and those paralyzed by spinal cord injuries.[7]

If the visibility of the disabled generally, and for our purposes disabled veterans specifically, has increased in this century, so, too, has our ability to *see* them—to conceive of the meanings and consequences of disability and to understand the lived experiences of people with disabilities in the context of both war and peace. This conceptual breakthrough has advanced from a number of directions. In the twentieth century, war came to be associated with bureaucratized and technologized slaughter and large-scale environmental destruction that increasingly found its victims more or less indiscriminately among combatants and civilians alike. As Fussell demonstrated, in the hellish circumstances of trench warfare during World War I men fought desperately to survive, and war failed to retain the romantic haze of heroic values that was perhaps its principal ideological legacy from distant times to the imagination of modern cultures. Soldiers found their courage not in archetypes of good character, but in the desire to avoid displaying humiliating cowardice before their peers.[8] Much more common than the expectation of chivalric behavior has become the understanding of war one finds in the works of psychiatrists from Abram Kardiner to Jonathan Shay and of the neurologist William H. R. Rivers. Their reports on clinical practice document in excruciating detail the devastating psychoneurotic effects of war on the character of those who do the fighting. It is not difficult retrospectively to find these effects throughout history, but in the past they were mixed with the physical problems all soldiers faced from deprivation, disease, and exposure, so the balance of the mental and the physical was unclear. In the twentieth century, armies were healthier and better fed in the field than ever before; thus, the physical has been factored out increasingly, and we are left with war's destruction of the mind. Powerful antiwar implications are also found in the work of the philosopher Elaine Scarry, whose deconstruction of war and its official justifications and avowed purposes makes the case that war ultimately exists solely to create injury to

Greengard, Carola. Theatre in Crisis: Sophocles' Reconstruction of Genre and Politics in Philoctetes. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1987.

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shepherd with the music of a flute but bellowing in the distance as he stumbles from his wound.... And his bellowing is terrifying" (213-218).

Although savage and shepherd share important functions of fertility and natural process in their relation to the natural world, their distinction is important to the world of tragedy and the civilized polis because the political world defines the moral and does so differently than in later periods. The herdsman of *Oedipus the King,* for instance, is also a romance derivative but plays a minor role that is easily assimilated to the function of other lower class figures in such subservient roles. Although the savage might seem of a lower order than the herdsman, in the Greek view he exists altogether outside the polis structure and is thereby a figure of unrestrained and superhuman potential. To the extent that he is more bestial, he contains within himself more of nature's power.

The treatment of Philoctetes is intimately bound to the role of the landscape setting in this play. It would have been immediately apparent to the ancient audience that Sophocles' Philoctetes is an heroic figure of full daemonic power who commands the divinity of natural energy as only an aristocratic hero can. This close relationship between protagonist and setting becomes increasingly important as the focus of the play shifts from the influence of epic figures and themes to the powerful and mysterious hold of Lemnos on his own nature. Philoctetes' lineage is a complicated one for an aristocratic hero of tragedy. The wild and deserted island scenery through which he moves has reshaped him in a new mold as a similar scenery enlarged the power of Prospero.

If observed from the vantage of generic character types available to the Greek audience, Philoctetes' characterization is seen to incorporate the seemingly contradictory roles of *homo ferus* and aristocratic hero. The savagery that drives his heroic inflexibility is worthy of Achilles, also something of a wild figure, and provides the link between the two paradigms by being treated literally and historically. Through long years in the wilderness as a forgotten warrior, this hero has evolved into an *homo ferus.*

Both heroes through their savage power achieve daemonic stature, but the ways in which Philoctetes' characterization departs from the Achillean prototype is significant. Philoctetes is transformed rather than being destroyed.

The capacity for change, subjecting Philoctetes to rotting disease but also opening the way to healing, saves him from tragic doom and thereby saves him for a restoration worthy of a romance king. Change, socialization and reintegration are processes refused to or by such archetypal epic and tragic heroes as Achilles and Ajax but are well-known events in romance. Philoctetes is far removed from the purity of the tragic hero. Just as he contains within himself both capacity for change and unwillingness to change, he also partakes of the natural world's ambivalence by incorporating its productive as well as destructive strength. He has moved out of the heroic and Achillean world in which the warrior provides savage power at the expense of political unity. That force is necessary for battling the enemy but must be excluded for preservation of civic peace. In the world of *Philoctetes* the excluded warrior becomes a chosen hero with vital power to restore the disrupted human realm.

The fertile and restorative aspect of the natural world is conventionally included in the realm of romance as an erotic motif. Characters of debased and rampant sexuality, such as satyrs or unmanning witches, populate the romance plot alongside characters of idealized and restrained sexuality, such as aristocratic lovers. Characteristically, the landscape setting is a backdrop for the romance hero's love adventures. These often culminate in marriage, typically a miraculous reunion with his lost love.

At first it appears that the erotic themes of romance and pastoral, whether figured in nubile princess, sexual witch or buxom shepherdess, have been excluded from this politicized and militarized version. It would be wrong to read this as a necessary consequence of the story's epic roots. Epic heroes are usually not exempt from romance treatment, and we know of many popular stories about erotic unions of other heroes (Neoptolemus and Hermione, Achilles and Helen, etc.). Philoctetes' myths, however, include no such stories, and Sophocles has used the tradi-

logic of the dramatic action is a continuous effort to retrieve Philoctetes that culminates in Heracles' pronouncement.

Not only is the scene of Philoctetes' suffering displaced from the reversal, it is unmotivated as far as the plot action of the drama is concerned. It is one of those Sophoclean events, like the mysterious first burial and the whirlwind in *Antigone* or the Corinthian Messenger's entrance in *Oedipus the King,* that has no apparent human cause; so far as the characters in the drama can perceive, it just happens. In the *Philoctetes,* however, rather than being embedded in a chain of events it is the central event in the dramatic focus.

The depiction of Philoctetes' agony on stage also departs from the tragic convention of reporting physically violent events in narrative form through a messenger speech. The protracted representation of the writhing and incoherent hero is a powerful and unusually unpleasant scene for Attic tragedy. It necessarily stimulates the desire for relief, and that desire is intensified because one is watching an action in process. The suffering is not yet a finished event susceptible to narrative recollection and the solace of tragic lamentation.

The structural ambiguity of the scene of suffering — unmotivated, displaced and premature — allows a twofold ambivalence in its treatment. To desire Philoctetes' relief at this stage is to desire the unheroic outcome, the success of Neoptolemus' scheme. If the play moved without complication from the scheming in the prologue to the moment of Philoctetes' total vulnerability, the problem confronting the audience would be an unpleasant but straightforward contradiction between heroic suffering and picaresque restoration at the level of plot outcome. But the long intervening scene between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes has introduced a second uncertainty. What in fact are Neoptolemus' intentions at this point? To capture the bow and abandon the man? To deliver man and bow over to the Greek army? Or has Neoptolemus shifted at some indeterminate point to abandon his deception and answer the suppliant's plea for passage home? The second uncertainty has its source in the ambiguous information and ambiguous role for Neoptolemus

that Sophocles has carefully built into the intermediate scene. Neoptolemus' action cannot be judged until his intentions are determined.

The most striking departures from conventional tragic structure are the abrupt *deus ex machina* conclusion, aborting the carefully developed plot rather than arising from it and so portending comic restoration rather than tragic disintegration, and the displaced scene of suffering, now severed from dénouement and marking a pivotal shift toward health rather than the tragic destruction of the protagonist. If one observes the action alone, Philoctetes bounces back from the jaws of death as well as any comic hero after a narrow escape. But in *Philoctetes* the conventional devices of comic plot do not evoke the conventional response of liberating relief and celebration. To understand how Sophocles uses comic structures to produce uncomic effects one must look back to earlier sections of the play, where less obvious departures from normative tragic conventions already exist.

Following Odysseus' exit at the end of the prologue the entrapment of Philoctetes by Neoptolemus begins and the basis of the dialogue becomes narrative. Philoctetes' lengthy autobiographical story (254-316) is followed by a story-telling sequence in which Neoptolemus gradually constructs a narrative pseudo-history of the Trojan War in answer to Philoctetes' questions about what has happened during his ten years of isolation (319-465).[14] Neoptolemus' skillful blend of dramatic "truth" and "fiction" and of contradictory epic sources well-known to the audience creates an internally consistent story that has the power of a

14. Two stories are interwoven: an emotionally charged review of the heroes in the *Iliad* (the noble have died; the ignoble survived) and a presumably fictitious account of Neoptolemus' personal betrayal and the loss of his father's arms at the hands of Odysseus. Neoptolemus' fiction draws heavily on familiar story patterns of the post-*Iliad* epic cycle, notably Odysseus' stratagem to trick Achilles into leaving his island home of Scyros and entering the Trojan War and Odysseus' capture of the arms of Achilles at Ajax's expense. In addition, Neoptolemus' account is shaped to duplicate both Philoctetes' presentation of his own experience of betrayal at the hands of the Greek commanders and the prologue's revelation to the audience that Neoptolemus has himself been lured into a mission of deceit under false pretenses.

Romance Complications

Lattimore has drawn attention to the fine line between romance and tragic story pattern in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King,* an ironic and tragic inversion of the tale of the noble foundling restored to his parents and kingdom.[19] Sophoclean irony is at work in *Philoctetes* as well. If one attempts to separate out the tragic elements in the characterization of its protagonist, what remains of *Philoctetes,* its understructure as it were, is a story, a setting and a hero that provide a strikingly complete rendition of a romance tale of a particular mold.[20] Here is an island castaway with a magical instrument who experiences a symbolic rebirth, a miraculous cure and a restoration to an ailing society that is itself cured through the hero's magical potency.

Romance hero and setting are not part of our usual expectations for Athenian tragedy. In *Philoctetes* these elements are particularly easy to neglect for two reasons. First, Sophocles has filled the opening scenes of this play with epic concerns. The task initially set out by Odysseus and Neoptolemus is that of a military embassy commissioned to recover a hero for battle, and

19. R. Lattimore, *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy* (1958), 82 ff.

20. The best discussion of romance stories and themes in the early period may be found in S. Trenkner's *The Greek Novella in the Classical Period* (1958). Trenkner cites romance historiography, whose popularity began in the late fifth century, and folk tale as major influences on the adventure story novella. Her study collects much material from historiographers of the classical period as well as from Euripides and Old Comedy. (Sophocles as so often goes unnoticed.) Fifth century materials are so fragmentary for literary sources and so indirect for oral tales (preserved only in the adaptations of rhetoricians, historians or playwrights) that it is virtually impossible to distinguish popular and high literature as separate genres or to establish the interrelation between the two. I have, therefore, not attempted to pinpoint separate generic sources for what I treat broadly as "romance" conventions. I do restrict the term "comic" to motifs found in classical drama (Old Comedy and satyr play) whether or not these also occur in romance epic or other genres.

Philoctetes and Neoptolemus in their first long scene together recount the fates of the well-known heroes of the Trojan War. The playwright has rapidly shifted attention to the epic ancestry of the story and its familiar characters. Consequently the opening visual effect of the landscape setting and island castaway is temporarily suppressed by the evocative power of the discourse. Second, the motifs of conventional tragedy are so familiar to a modern audience and so recognizably powerful in *Philoctetes* that it is easy for us to neglect the other generic traditions at work in this drama. In *Philoctetes* the tragic material is complicated at every turn by motifs drawn from comedy and romance, motifs that would have been familiar to the original audience but are not immediately apparent to us. Only by recognizing the unique effect created by merging genres that are usually separate can we regain an understanding of this drama's anomalous structure and the significance of its unexpected resolution.

No complete romance work from the fifth century or earlier survives, although the *Odyssey* is often used to provide critics with an epic paradigm for romance as the *Iliad* fulfills that role for tragedy. The *Odyssey* is an important literary precursor and referent for *Philoctetes,* as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, since the relationship is a complicated one and the *Odyssey* itself is a sophisticated variation of romance, it will be helpful first to look to other sources for an understanding of what Sophocles has incorporated from the realm of romance.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* a romance drama *par excellence,* shares with *Philoctetes* a number of important themes that are specifically romance concerns and that conflict with our understanding of the "tragic vision". In fact, Kermode's introductory essay to *The Tempest* provides a useful starting point for an analysis of the dramatic world that Sophocles has organized in *Philoctetes.*

> Romance could be defined as a mode of exhibiting the action of magical and moral laws in a version of human life so selective as to obscure, for the special purpose of concentrating attention on these laws, the

> fact that in reality their force is intermittent and only fitfully glimpsed.... In romance there survives that system of ideal correspondences and magic patterns which in actuality could not survive the scrutiny of an informed and modern eye. It thrives upon the myth of the indefeasible magnanimity of royal children as it does upon the myth of the magical connexion between the fertility of a king and of his lands and subjects.[21]

In this same essay Kermode notes that, while drawing on the contrast between natural and civilized societies and men that underlies all pastoral literature, *The Tempest* provides a conception of the natural man that is an inversion of the pastoral hero. Caliban is no gentle shepherd but a deformed and savage figure, a Linnaean *homo ferus.*

The gentle shepherd and aggressive wild man are familiar inhabitants of the romance world. They are not, however, systematically differentiated until the Roman period and this urges care in interpretation of the Sophoclean figure. In a line that runs from the Babylonian Enkidu of *Gilgamesh* to the Homeric Cyclops and the fifth century satyrs, and is still perceivable in the boorish countrymen of Theocritus' Hellenistic poems, the shepherd remains closely related to the wild man. Herdsman or savage, the natural man wields the magical potency of fertility by being in touch with Nature, a potency lost to the urban inhabitant but whose aggressive potential must be developed, controlled and directed to social ends if it is to be moral and successful. By surviving passage into and out of the wilderness, such figures retain vital contact with the forces there and reflect these in their own nature. In the Greek conception the natural man, whether in respectable or debased form, mediates between polis and natural world. The redemptive magic of Prospero and the lustful black magic of Sycorax are combined in the pre-Vergilian pagan conception.

21. F. Kermode, Introduction to the "Arden" *Tempest* (1954), liv and lvi.

The worlds of divine power and of natural fertility have not yet been severed. As a result, the arts of civilization are inextricably embedded in their natural matrix. The choruses of tragedy have a persistent habit of reminding their audiences that even the gods are subject to the pleasures of Aphrodite. Their divinity consists not in exercising civilized control over nature from above but in having the power to organize and utilize their own extraordinary natural force in productive ways. Like humans, they are both civilized and natural. Their civilized skills surpass those of humans to the extent that their natural powers are also greater, large enough to encompass the full power of nature and survive its contradictions. Creation and achievement are effortless for the gods, and their limitless energy is not subject to expenditure or destruction, which is to say that they are defined by their immortality.

A different relationship between the civilized and natural worlds necessarily exists than in later pastoral literature. The arts of the polis, its *technai,* are its socializing laws and its technological skills, but the polis is only powerful to the extent that it successfully organizes the natural resources of which it is comprised, its land and its human inhabitants. The hero is effective in exact proportion to his savage power. The romance reunification of art and nature is therefore not achieved via subjugation of the natural world or exclusion of the savage man. Rather, it takes place through the cooperative relationship established between the two; it is a socializing process that channels the hero's natural energy for productive rather than destructive ends. In *Philoctetes* this is expressed as a specifically political process. The Greek army is impotent, divided and corrupt without Philoctetes, and the reunification is signalled not by feasting or marriage, as in conventional romance, but by cooperative armed aggression, a military victory.

Surprisingly, the Sophoclean Philoctetes contains much of the natural man, and he is specifically delineated as *homo ferus*, not herdsman. The chorus, primed by Odysseus, prepares the audience expectation for a wild Cyclopean creature returning to his lair. They hear him approaching the stage "not like a country

shepherd with the music of a flute but bellowing in the distance as he stumbles from his wound.... And his bellowing is terrifying" (213-218).

Although savage and shepherd share important functions of fertility and natural process in their relation to the natural world, their distinction is important to the world of tragedy and the civilized polis because the political world defines the moral and does so differently than in later periods. The herdsman of *Oedipus the King,* for instance, is also a romance derivative but plays a minor role that is easily assimilated to the function of other lower class figures in such subservient roles. Although the savage might seem of a lower order than the herdsman, in the Greek view he exists altogether outside the polis structure and is thereby a figure of unrestrained and superhuman potential. To the extent that he is more bestial, he contains within himself more of nature's power.

The treatment of Philoctetes is intimately bound to the role of the landscape setting in this play. It would have been immediately apparent to the ancient audience that Sophocles' Philoctetes is an heroic figure of full daemonic power who commands the divinity of natural energy as only an aristocratic hero can. This close relationship between protagonist and setting becomes increasingly important as the focus of the play shifts from the influence of epic figures and themes to the powerful and mysterious hold of Lemnos on his own nature. Philoctetes' lineage is a complicated one for an aristocratic hero of tragedy. The wild and deserted island scenery through which he moves has reshaped him in a new mold as a similar scenery enlarged the power of Prospero.

If observed from the vantage of generic character types available to the Greek audience, Philoctetes' characterization is seen to incorporate the seemingly contradictory roles of *homo ferus* and aristocratic hero. The savagery that drives his heroic inflexibility is worthy of Achilles, also something of a wild figure, and provides the link between the two paradigms by being treated literally and historically. Through long years in the wilderness as a forgotten warrior, this hero has evolved into an *homo ferus.*

Both heroes through their savage power achieve daemonic stature, but the ways in which Philoctetes' characterization departs from the Achillean prototype is significant. Philoctetes is transformed rather than being destroyed.

The capacity for change, subjecting Philoctetes to rotting disease but also opening the way to healing, saves him from tragic doom and thereby saves him for a restoration worthy of a romance king. Change, socialization and reintegration are processes refused to or by such archetypal epic and tragic heroes as Achilles and Ajax but are well-known events in romance. Philoctetes is far removed from the purity of the tragic hero. Just as he contains within himself both capacity for change and unwillingness to change, he also partakes of the natural world's ambivalence by incorporating its productive as well as destructive strength. He has moved out of the heroic and Achillean world in which the warrior provides savage power at the expense of political unity. That force is necessary for battling the enemy but must be excluded for preservation of civic peace. In the world of *Philoctetes* the excluded warrior becomes a chosen hero with vital power to restore the disrupted human realm.

The fertile and restorative aspect of the natural world is conventionally included in the realm of romance as an erotic motif. Characters of debased and rampant sexuality, such as satyrs or unmanning witches, populate the romance plot alongside characters of idealized and restrained sexuality, such as aristocratic lovers. Characteristically, the landscape setting is a backdrop for the romance hero's love adventures. These often culminate in marriage, typically a miraculous reunion with his lost love.

At first it appears that the erotic themes of romance and pastoral, whether figured in nubile princess, sexual witch or buxom shepherdess, have been excluded from this politicized and militarized version. It would be wrong to read this as a necessary consequence of the story's epic roots. Epic heroes are usually not exempt from romance treatment, and we know of many popular stories about erotic unions of other heroes (Neoptolemus and Hermione, Achilles and Helen, etc.). Philoctetes' myths, however, include no such stories, and Sophocles has used the tradi-

tional portrayal of this figure as a man among men for his own dramatic purposes.[22]

The *Philoctetes* is unique among extant tragedies in having no female roles at all; the world of war and politics is here treated as an exclusively masculine world. Given this, it is striking that the poetry of the play resonates with sexual language. Eroticized diction is used especially for the landscape and, even more surprisingly, for the hero's wound. As much as the past heroic battles and military missions dominate the earlier diction of the drama, the landscape, in which Philoctetes now anticipates dying, dominates the later scenes. Philoctetes addresses the island landscape directly in four lyrically styled soliloquies in the second half of the drama (936 ff., 1081 ff., 1146 ff., 1452 ff.). By conventional literary norms, landscape should not play so important or personal a role in tragedy. Further, this particular wilderness setting is anomalous for being imaged as nurturing as well as threatening.

Philoctetes' environment differs markedly from the usual epic hero's surroundings in that aggressive and masculinized heroic versions of animal predators have been banished. Boars, lions and wolves are nowhere to be seen. The exclusion of the predatory beast creates a landscape of cyclical nature and nurture, what could be described as a feminized scenery. Philoctetes is nourished by it, as it will be by him if he is left without his bow. In a vision of inverted nurture when his bow has been seized and he foresees his death on the island, Philoctetes states explicitly that he is the only predator. Without his bow "this land no longer holds terror or need for flight" (1153-1154) and the creatures who feed on him are not predators, or even the threatening scavengers who haunt heroic battlefields. To Philoctetes they will follow nature's dictates, taking blood for blood, when they consume his flesh after he has died, no longer able to avail himself of nature's sustenance. The theft of the bow — the human intrusion, not the landscape or its creatures — will cause his death.

The two features of this landscape recurrently invoked by Philoctetes are the island's cave and birds. Both images are heavily referential to cult and both supply rich literary connotations owing to their frequent use in romance and comedy. The two-mouthed cave would immediately suggest to the audience the traditional Greek depiction of the underworld, an underground cavern with one entrance for arriving souls and one for departing. But the cave is ambivalent, as all things natural always are in Greek myth. Already in the prologue this cave is identified as a protective retreat, and Philoctetes' own lines throughout the drama stress increasingly its womb-like aspects. In his final farewell to the island, Philoctetes personifies the cave and invokes it together with the local nymphs of the island's meadows and waters (1453-1454). Every Greek landscape was inhabited by its nymphs and the role of these local natural spirits in overseeing childbirth was a further acknowledgment of man's direct dependence on the powers of natural fertility. A long history of literary and cult precedents for the association of nymphs and caves confers a dual symbolic significance on Philoctetes' cave as locus of his surrogate death but also of his rebirth as a changed and more powerful hero.[23]

22. The myths about Philoctetes concern his Trojan War role (including being healed at Troy and slaying Paris with Heracles' bow and arrows), his association with Heracles, and his role as an heroic founder of several Greek cities in Italy

23. The cave, earlier in the play a "two-mouthed rock" or "rocky hollow" (16, 1081) like Antigone's tomb, becomes in the final farewell the "chamber" (1453) in whose "inmost recess" Philoctetes was so often wetted by the sea spray in southern storms (1456-1457). Sophocles seems to be punning on "engendered" and "wetted" (*etegchthē* 1456, *cp.* to *etechthē*) and the context is suggestive: cave chamber (1453), female island nymphs (1454) and "male" sea (1455) are invoked as a triad. Mournful tears of despair and fertilizing spray are thus combined in one image of death/birth. As sacred guardians of the newborn, sacrifices were made to the appropriate local nymphs at the birth of a child. Their association with specific features of a given locality remained in force throughout the classical period. Philoctetes' final address to the island of Lemnos follows this tradition. As indwelling spirits of the natural scenery, nymphs were usually portrayed as inhabiting caves or grottos, where they were often worshipped in rural cult. Odysseus' epic voyage begins and ends in such

Just as Philoctetes withdraws to the cave more for protection than in fear, so he also addresses the birds not as adversaries to be fought in battle but as nurturing companions. Philoctetes' passive doves neither stalk him nor turn to fight; they flee (1149), as do the other "mountain" creatures to which he occasionally alludes but never identifies by name (937, 955, 1147). By replacing the specific savage beasts who usually inhabit Greek wilderness scenes with winged prey, Sophocles has again feminized the Lemnian landscape. Birds carried many symbolic roles in Greek literature and cult, and these often shared the mythic significance of woman as procreator and nurturer. As birds could mediate between heaven and earth for mortals, woman could mediate between nature and culture for men. For instance, birds sometimes represented a superior order of life in which aggressive behavior is sacrificed in favor of familial devotion and a life of mutual nurture (e.g., Sophocles, *Electra* 1058-1062). Better known is their function, suggested by their higher habitat, as divine messengers or even as embodiments of gods and goddesses descending from Mount Olympus. Another symbolic function, much undervalued in classical scholarship but of particular relevance to this play, is the commonplace ancient use of birds in sexual imagery throughout Greek art and literature. In literature, the sources are primarily old comedy and erotic lyric.[24] Sappho, for instance, in the famous "Hymn to Aphrodite" beseeches the goddess to descend to earth in her chariot drawn by "beautiful and swift" sparrows, thus combining several symbolic motifs. In general then, as predatory beasts would have suggested to the audience the literary conventions of epic battles and hunts, birds suggest instead the conventions of comedy and lyric, of fertility and its erotic energy.

Birds and cave, like the natural setting itself, carry ambivalent associations and represent in a familiar language of popular symbolism the mingling of generative and deadly forces. The cave is both womb and tomb. The birds are both eaten and eater. Philoctetes acknowledges this in his own terms of address to landscape, cave and birds. From the heroic vantage in the beginning of this drama, Lemnos seemed to be the land of exile from the polis and therefore a living death. By the play's end, it is seen to be equally or more the sacred precinct of rebirth.

The warrior and his bow disturb the balance of this natural world. In broader terms, it is man who introduces polarity and duality to the natural world. Predator and prey are not categories relevant to the landscape until the arrival of Philoctetes and the other warriors drawn to Lemnos by the magnet of his presence and the bow. The ultimate terms of the opposition are nature and polis, polis in the ancient sense of a protected and bounded locus of civilization within an expanse of natural wilderness. The mediator between the unified and self-contradictory world of natural forces and the strictly polarized world of the polis is the culture hero with his tool of trade in hand. In the Sophoclean conception, the civilizing force is embodied in Man, specifically masculine, and nature is Mother Nature and feminine, as she remains for the next millenia.

Since Philoctetes first introduces aggression into this protected environment and has nothing to fear from it in return, he can address his island with tenderness and nostalgia as one might speak to a gentle lover or a mother whom one is about to leave.

double-entranced grotto (one door for mortals and one for gods) of the nymphs on his home island of Ithaca. (See also p. 64.) The theme of a romantic union between civilized Greek voyager and native woodland spirit is a paradigm for the frequent marriages of nymphs and heroes in Greek foundation myth, a popular form of Greek romantic tale. These foundation stories attest to the traditional erotic association between female nymphs of the natural locale and the male founders of new colonial cities. Philoctetes was the hero of a number of foundation stories. Although no marriage tale for Philoctetes survives, such a story may have existed locally and become lost. In any case, Sophocles has utilized the erotic symbolism of nymphs and caves for Philoctetes' powerful attachment to the wild scenery of Lemnos.

24. Aristophanes' *Birds* parodies all three aspects — heavenly, familial, sexual — of the literary conventions. The wide-ranging implications of the Greek use of birds in literature and art to symbolize the underlying energy of nature and human nature are brilliantly explored by W. Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy Politics of Eros" (*Arion*, *N.S. 1*, 1973) 119 ff. Many of his observations, in particular on the relation between political *erōs* (ambition) and natural *erōs* (sexuality) are germane to the argument of this study.

Masculine diction enters only in his closing lines of farewell and it is explicit there: the "male pounding" of the sea (1455) from which his cavern's "inmost recess" (1457) often protected him. The sea is what separates Philoctetes from both battlefield glories and homeland. This is the sea traversed by Alcibiades' navy and the merchant ships but across which Philoctetes has not yet found escape although he has learned sheer survival in the primal island world. It is a strange and powerful image of the peaceable kingdom, this rocky island rising from the sea. Its steep cliffs protect the maternal and nurturing earth and freshwater streams from the violent and deafening dangers of the masculine sea below. In this natural realm the maternal land is jutting and the breeding sea growls like a male predator; the boundaries of gender are annihilated. Philoctetes alone has introduced the sexuality of gender. The birds must fall to his phallic arrows and the island, like a providing woman, nurture him, a helpless man.

What does prey on Philoctetes in his island home is his own wound, and the wound's force is that of a devouring woman, the prostitute or the wandering witch. This is a different aspect of female nature than the nurturing mother embodied in the landscape itself. "She comes from time to time when she has grown sated with her roamings" (758-759). "Piercing and swift, she visits and leaves" (807-808). As Philoctetes has introduced a new force of male aggression onto the island with his bow, so he has also brought with him his female devouring wound like a personal monster. Philoctetes cannot hide her from Neoptolemus but stands exposed as she destroys and consumes him alive (743-745). In a fresh attack, the blood gushes from "the depths" of his wound and he speaks to his foot: "Foot, what horrible thing are you doing to me?" (786). Foot and wound are inseparable. The disease pours from inside his foot but approaches like a monster from the outside. As the seizure nears culmination, Philoctetes cries for death; he begs to be burned like Heracles and incomprehensibly rants about going "there", "up", being "let loose" (814-816). "O Earth", he says, "take me as I am, dying; this wound no longer lets me stand erect" (819-820). The phallic symbolism of the foot is apposite to the scene, and the foot with

the bleeding wound is suggestively androgynous.

Fifth century authors seem to reflect both the substance and clinical precision of the Hippocratic corpus in their own depictions of disease.[25] It is also a long-standing convention of erotic poetry to adapt the heroic pathology of fear of imminent death to the needs of erotic pathology. The most notable example is Sappho's self-analysis of her passion's symptomology: speechlessness, fever, sweating and trembling (Lobel Page 31). Sophocles has brought together these linguistic conventions. The Greek assumption that all extreme events of human experience

25. P.R. Vasquez, in *Literary Convention in Scenes of Madness and Suffering in Greek Tragedy* (Diss. Columbia University, 1972), documents the elements that recur in such scenes of suffering and explores their literary prototypes, including medical writings of the Hippocratic corpus. In an appendix on religious and medical influences, 411 ff., Vasquez discusses the tragedians' use of several motifs that probably derive from the traditional depiction of daemons, notably treatment of the illness as a wild animal attack and as a wandering disease. She suggests that during the fifth century the popular notion of external agency and a daemonic cause came under attack by doctors, who ascribed all such disease, including madness, to natural causes. From this point of view it would seem that Sophocles has drawn heavily on the tradition described by Vasquez for the imagery in *Philoctetes* (hunting and attacking, biting and devouring, cohabiting, and lulling to sleep), but has conceptualized the hero's disease as primarily physical, thereby reducing the traditional emphasis on madness and external agency. For instance, the Furies, who are most frequently associated with such disease in tragedy and who represent both its insane and daemonic aspects, are not present in this play. Vasquez, 351 f., notes that the bite of the snake who guarded Chryse's shrine serves as a "surrogate ... for daemonic intervention" by having caused the disease and by informing the imagery of the play, but that "in the action dramatized, it has become an indissolvable part of the hero's character and actions". In the *Philoctetes* scene Sophocles has combined other elements with the conventional ones described by Vasquez. The compelling depiction of the wound as a destroyer within is also used for Heracles' agony in Sophocles' earlier tragedy, *Women of Trachis*. There, the feminine gender of "disease" (*nosos*) is played on as Heracles names his "savage disease" (*agria nosos* 1030) and "devouring disease" (*diaboros nosos* 1084) in a long tirade against his wife, "a woman, by nature female" (*gunē thēlus phūsa* 1062), who has caused his destruction. Heracles describes himself as unmanned and reduced to the wailing of a young girl (*parthenos* 1071). In *Philoctetes* the wound is simply personified as "she". What was symbolic for Heracles becomes literal for Philoctetes.

draw on an underlying pathology of irrational seizure allows him the economy of language to join the strands. Medical seizure, death throes, childbirth, erotic experience are consistently described as madness in Greek authors, but an insanity whose pathology is specifically that of violent and contradictory physical symptoms, a disease of uncontrolled nature.

The literal description in this scene is of a seizure defined in medical terms, but Sophocles has drawn on the Greek poetic conventions to unite the diction of life's three great natural boundaries — birth, sexuality and death — with that of disease. The unifying symbolism is one of natural birth, and this accounts for the unconventional cry of tragic suffering that Philoctetes gives several times at the center of the scene: *papai apappapai* (745-746, 785-786, 792-793; *pai*-"child"). His stuttering utterance is framed by repeated references to Neoptolemus as "child", (733-811 *passim*) reinforcing the symbolism. This is the romance scene of rebirth, and its culmination in sleep/death/upward release gives it also the symbolic value of apotheosis, which is thereby treated as one more form of birth. The similarity to Sophocles' earlier depiction of Heracles' death agony in *Women of Trachis* is striking. In fact, the chorus' lines immediately preceding the scene of suffering in *Philoctetes* allude to Heracles' funeral pyre and apotheosis (727-729) and so direct the audience's attention to the explicit verbal references that follow.

The simultaneous imagery of sexual experience provides a special Sophoclean significance. Neither birth nor rebirth is an individual segment of a temporal sequence, but both partake of the recurrent structure of physical experience. The fundamental pattern of increase, climax and release draws all human experience into a single natural process. The various stages of the life cycle that are normally differentiated in narrative structure are here collapsed into one experience. As nature on Lemnos does not demarcate boundaries between male-female and predator-prey, so Philoctetes' own nature encompasses the contradictions inherent in creation, sexuality and disintegration. Neoptolemus' description of Philoctetes as he finally sinks into sleep joins in a single image all the strands. They achieve simultaneous culmination — medical, erotic, birth and heroic death — as the hero succumbs to the wound in his heel. "His head falls back, the sweat pours down his whole body, and a dark discharge, violently bleeding, breaks from his heel" (822-825).

To summarize the argument so far, the most usual setting for Athenian tragedy is the social realm, the world of the polis or the military camp. There are a substantial number of tragic settings that depart from this norm, but almost always in favor of an intermediate realm: temple precinct, heroic cemetery, or even a village. The Philoctetes story necessitates an island setting, but in both the Euripidean and Aeschylean plays the social context was represented by a chorus of Lemnians. By replacing that chorus with visiting sailors, Sophocles has purified the setting to create a deserted landscape of romance and grant it a new and powerful symbolic meaning.

From the standpoint of the epic story and of Philoctetes' role as Greek citizen and military commander, this landscape represents a wasteland. To the civilized Greek, Philoctetes' enforced isolation and passive survival are a surrogate death and his cave is a surrogate grave. Sophocles' language, however, creates from the setting a world of nurture and birth, and always with implicit reference to the heroic antithesis of predation and the hunt and of battlefield scavengers, the vultures and dogs. The forces that move Philoctetes' landscape are those of natural creativity and life, and the scenery suggests, rather than the battlefield graveyard, the mountain caves in which gods are bred.

Such a role for the Lemnian setting is richly allusive, for Lemnos was traditionally associated with the Cybele cult and with myths that center on murderous conflict between men and women or exclusive occupancy of the island by women.[26] To the

26. The most famous myth is that of the Lemnian women killing all the men on the island in revenge for desertion. Jason and the Argonauts found the island in possession of the women and mated with them. In historical time Lemnos was colonized by Athenians, and Herodotus adds several stories about the later population which show a common structure of rape followed by wholesale murder, always in the context of enmity between the Greek and non-Greek inhabitants. He traces the origin of "Lemnian deeds" as a common Greek term

extent that this wild landscape is dangerous to Philoctetes, it is the danger inherent for civilized men in the natural cycle of fertility and contact with female energy. Sophocles has retained the identification of Lemnos with female power and found in that power both a maternal nurturing function of primal Nature and a destructive revenge of woman, called into being as man attempts to take control and move toward a realm of civilized values. Civilized man demands individuation and establishes his identity by aggression, thereby creating the antitheses of genders and generations and the antithesis of nature and polis. The aggressive power of the hunter or warrior, represented by the "historical" male intruders to the mythic Lemnian precinct, evokes Chryse's anger and the savage wound.[27] A similar confrontation, but one that ends in disastrous disintegration rather than reintegration, takes place in the roughly contemporary Euripidean drama, *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.). The theme is common to many fifth century tragedies and most often embodied in the Furies.

Philoctetes' seizure at the mouth of the cave changes the story for him as well as Neoptolemus. The new Philoctetes is born from the death pangs of the hobbled archaic hero, and the deceitful child who witnesses is transformed to the compassionate and mature Neoptolemus. It is from this scene forward that Philoctetes must begin to separate himself from Lemnos and that the powerful control of Odysseus with the armed forces behind him begins to recede. In terms of genre, the pivotal scene of agony marks the moment when the process of time begins to take hold. The drama shifts to actions, and the romance process of becoming, although halting at first, gradually overwhelms the tragic stasis. The episodic action that characterizes a romance plot may seem, from the perspective of high art, naive. But the redemptive power of time and natural process belong in the realm of romance. As tragedy defies time and comedy restores the lost order of the past, romance progresses. It is true to Sophocles' sense of divine mystery and human blindness that the full significance of this rebirth is not felt until the very last lines of the drama.

of opprobrium to these stories of primitive savagery (Herod. 6.137-139). W. Burkert, "Jason, Hypsipyle, and New Fire at Lemnos" (*CQ, N.S. 20*, 1970), 1 ff., presents a study of the relation between the myths and rituals associated with Lemnos. More recently Charles Segal, in *Tragedy and Civilization: an interpretation of Sophocles* (1981), employs further anthropological materials in a broad discussion of the myths associated with Lemnos. He relates certain of these myths to motifs in the Sophoclean play, for instance, a mirroring of the offensive odor of the mythic Lemnian women in Philoctetes' foul wound, Hephaistos' lameness and exile from Olympus and his role of fire-god and civilizer on Lemnos as a paradigm for Philoctetes, and the cruelty of the local goddess Chryse in the context of a structuralist dichotomy between savage and civilized.

27. Philoctetes was bitten on the leg by a snake guarding Chryse's altar. This story was well known, e.g., *Iliad* 2.721 ff. Sophocles chose not to stress the divine wrath theme but rather to develop the symbolic implications. The shrine of Chryse was on an island near to Lemnos. (One myth locates the shrine on Lemnos itself.) All three of the great mythic expeditions to the Eastern Mediterranean stopped at this shrine to propitiate the goddess before entering the Hellespont. Jason sacrificed there with the Argonauts in his quest for the golden fleece (Heracles was included in this story). Heracles himself was leader of the first Trojan expedition, alluded to in several passages of the *Iliad*. The scene of sacrifice at Chryse's altar is depicted on a number of vases from the second half of the fifth century. E. Hooker, "The Sanctuary and Altar of Chryse in Attic Red-Figure Vase Paintings of the Late Fifth and Early Fourth Centuries, B.C." (*JHS 70*, 1950), 35-41, reviews the material and observes that some of the paintings apparently depict the young Philoctetes in attendance at the sacrifice presided over by Heracles at the start of the first Greek expedition [illegible] interest in Heracles' transcendent death and immortality gave rise to popular stories or cults more closely associating Heracles and Philoctetes. It was Philoctetes who released Heracles from his agony by kindling the funeral pyre and so earned the miraculous weapons as a reward. The picture of the youthful Philoctetes accompanying Heracles on the earlier expedition and being initiated into the sacrificial rites for Chryse by Heracles himself provides a ready parallel for the Neoptolemus-Philoctetes alliance of the second Trojan War and a suggestive context for the meeting between the elder and youthful warriors on Lemnos. If it is true that Sophocles [illegible] introduce Neoptolemus into the story of Philoctetes' rescue, the

Sophocles' Resolution

From the first moments of the play an extensive array of dramatic and poetic techniques has been utilized by Sophocles to qualify the antithetical opposition between Odysseus and Philoctetes and between the generic forms of comedy and tragedy, in each case by finding common ground beneath the opposition. The qualifications are built into the play as the "reality" of its dramatic world. However, within the structure of the play there is no possibility of satisfactory resolution provided. It is preemptively excluded by the characterizations of Odysseus and Philoctetes as antithetical dramatic figures, as individuals whose views of themselves and reality are mutually exclusive. Neither can operate in the other's reality, and Neoptolemus is left with no real mode of entry into meaningful action and no real education in any practical sense.

The dramatic problem can be restated as a formal conflict between the opposing values of two epic models, the tragedy of the individualistic and *kleos*-driven Achilles and the romance comedy of the adaptable and socially-oriented Odysseus. Put in these terms, the conflict allows a choice but no resolution. The same problem can also be stated as an historical one. The generation represented by Achilles and his peers in nobility is dead; the new world is the domain of the Atreidai junta, the demagogue Odysseus and the lower-class Thersites. If Achilles and his kind are all but gone, then only one of the alternatives provides for viable action in time present. The possibility for a meaningful choice has been destroyed with the past heroes. Whichever model of hero one chooses to follow, the only context for action is an unheroic world that the villains have inherited and shaped. As the survivors, they are in a position to dictate its terms.

As Sophocles has organized the action of the drama, the model of Odysseus has dominated the first half of the play; and

the Odyssean method is, after all, technically successful if morally unappealing. Philoctetes *can* be deceived and stolen, even if Neoptolemus chooses not to be the one to do it. The second half of the play is dominated by reversion to the model of Achillean behaviour. Neoptolemus returns to the fold, but a true son of Achilles in this world is an impotent Achilles. With Neoptolemus in the Achilles role, there is no successful conclusion to the story. A series of endings are attempted and each successively falls short: forceful removal of Philoctetes, suicide, theft of the bow, murder.

The dramatic crisis is swiftly resolved by the entry of Heracles as a third and as yet unexplored model for heroic action. This model is both successful and potent as it is both oracularly ordained and divine in nature. With the entrance of Heracles as an alternative form of heroic action, the possibility of resolution again arises. Heracles is neither the daemonic and isolated Achilles nor the human and civilized Odysseus but combines the best of both. Heracles is a culture hero whose daemonic strength and implement of power are at the disposal of society and civilization, and his story is a noble romance of a higher order than that of Odysseus. Heracles and the romance of the culture hero are the common ground that resolves the antithetical oppositions of both character and genre.

Heracles was the first heroic owner of Apollo's divine bow and with it he successfully led the first Greek expedition against Troy among the older generation of heroes. Philoctetes received the bow as a gift in acknowledgment of his compassion. He alone was willing to light Heracles' pyre and release him from his final suffering of a lingering and agonizing death in the shirt of Nessus. The appropriateness of Heracles for the conclusion of the Philoctetes story and the social significance of his bow is now generally recognized among scholars, but the modern popular conception of Heracles as a club-wielding archaic hero has divorced the figure from his newer role in fifth century cult and obscured the full power of the Sophoclean resolution.

Heracles' canonical labors are those of an archetypal culture hero who penetrates beyond the limits of the civilized world to

conquer beasts and barbarians or successfully complete any number of quests after magical objects or creatures. He wrestles with every form of threatening and boundary-defying nature, with Amazons, centaurs and even Death. He conquers with a savagery and superhuman force to match that of his opponents. As anthropologists tell us, this is the ambivalence inherent in all myths of culture heroes. Savagery can only be tamed by matching power. Out of this mythic tradition the post-Homeric archaic period shapes for Heracles an increasingly militarized role to suit the needs of the aristocratic society, and the socializing significance of this heroic evolution and its culmination in the strongly divinized figure of the late archaic period has been noted above.

A chronological account, however, is misleading, for the old myths are not replaced by new ones but rather subjected to new interpretation. Heracles evolves from a culture hero into what one might term a civilization hero. The culture hero labors alone to define the boundary between human and beast, and he keeps one foot in both worlds. The civilization hero and his compatriots battle to define the boundary between civilized man and barbarian. This boundary is defined as much by the bonds uniting the polis within as by the forces repelling the enemy without. The Prometheus of myth is a culture hero. Sophocles' Philoctetes is a civilization hero. The transformation of Heracles provides the link and mediates between the two.

The labors of Heracles that are sculpted on so many temples of the late archaic and classical period are still the canonical labors, but the figuration of the hero is of an ideal and civilized exemplar. The vase paintings also repeat the old stories, including Heracles' introduction to Mount Olympus, but they are joined by the new topos locating Heracles' apotheosis on Mount Oeta.[49] All the permutations exist simultaneously in the fifth century, and his frequent portrayal in comedy as the crude and violent buffoon with superhuman appetites suggests that his most primitive and uncivilized aspects maintained a powerful hold on the popular conception of Heracles, the tongue-in-cheek attitude toward that conception on the part of the aristocratic poets notwithstanding.

By the fifth century, Heracles' divine status and elevation above other heroes was already clear and strongly enough advanced for Herodotus to argue that he had originally been a divinity, not a hero, and that the heroic Heracles was simply a more recent namesake (Herod. 2. 44-45). Athens regarded as a distinction its claim to have been the first state to honor Heracles as a god, and the myth of his acceptance into the Eleusinian cult was gaining wide currency. The association of Heracles with Eleusis underscores the unusual religious and political significance of this cult figure, who could transcend the limits of both aristocratic hero cult and the more broadly based and often antagonistic mystery religions. By the early fourth century Heracles is, on the evidence of Isocrates, the most popular and honored divinity in Thebes (*Ph.* 32-33). The line to the ethical and ascetic Heracles of Hellenistic philosophy is clear and direct, despite the conceptual contradiction of its origins in a figure of physical and savage prowess.[50]

In fifth century cult, Heracles' protective functions as *Alexikakos* (Averter of Evil) and *Parastatēs* (Guardian Protector) were beginning to become identified with a role as protector against ghosts and disease, as was true of many other patron heroes and divinities with similar titles.[51] By the end of the cen-

49. An admirable survey of Heracles' representation in the art of this period may be found in the dissertation of Susan Woodford, *Exemplum Virtutis: A Study of Herakles in Athens in the Second Half of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Diss. Columbia University, 1966). She includes discussion of Heracles' role in both mystery cult and aristocratic cult during this period. See especially 170 ff. for the association of the Mt. Oeta pyre, Heracles' apotheosis, and the presents

50. The most complete history of cult material for Heracles remains that of L.R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality* (repr. 1970), 95 ff. Also useful is F. Brommer, *Herakles* (1953).

51. As medical Healer, Heracles gained a similar function to that of Apollo and Asclepius. For instance, the Attic cult of Heracles Alexikakos, like that of Apollo Alexikakos, was specifically associated with the Great Plague of 430 B.C. Sophocles' association with healing cults and the Asclepius cult in particular is well-known; he is supposed to have housed the divinity until completion of his new shrine on the Acropolis in 420 B.C. (Such evidence can be misleading; it is possible he was associated with Asclepius because of plays like *Philoc-*

tury the three major figures of healing cult were Apollo, Asclepius and Heracles. The cult practice of incubation, expressing the belief that Asclepius' cures were effected in a dream while the patient slept a magical and deep sleep, seems to have influenced the relation of disease and sleep in Sophocles' play. Certain of the shrines where incubation took place were in sacred caves rather than temples, and local nymphs were frequently associated with Asclepius. In addition, the ambivalent nature of Philoctetes' snake-bite seems enriched by reference to the divine snake that was thought to achieve many of Asclepius' cures and to be an incarnation of the divine physician.

Heracles' final pronouncement to Philoctetes is dramatically presented as being an announcement not only of the hero's cure but also of the apotheosis of Heracles and Asclepius, as if these were not known before to mortals. "And first I shall announce to you my own fortunes, how having suffered and endured so many labors I have achieved immortal *aretē*, as now it is in your power to behold.... As the healer of your disease I shall send forth Asclepius; for now a second time, Troy must be conquered by my weapons" (1418-1420, 1438-1440).

Conflicting stories of deserved death and deserved apotheosis were told of Asclepius as of a number of other heroes in the fifth century, and Sophocles' Heracles is revealing the correct tradition to the audience. Heracles therefore modifies the oracle in force throughout the play. It is not the physicians of the *Iliad*, the "sons of Asclepius", who will restore Philoctetes, but their physician father, who is thereby obliquely reported to have been granted immortality. As with Heracles' own apotheosis, Asclepius' fate cannot be known until a mortal exists who is noble enough to receive the miraculous sign in an epiphany.[52] Philoctetes' nobility is needed to mediate the apotheosis of Heracles and Asclepius as their intervention is needed to mediate the restoration and cure of Philoctetes. Recognition of apotheosis as divinity and rebirth of hero are mutually dependent.

named Telemachus. The question of why medical cults should proliferate and become of such importance in Athens at this time is an interesting one. Since physicians, like merchants, were part of the military's entourage, one is probably dealing with a recurrent historical phenomenon, the rapid advance of medical and surgical technology in times of war.

52. Sophocles in general observes a strict adherence to Sophistic theories of perception (see above, 77 ff.). Although he accepts epiphany and miracle (e.g., the first burial of Polyneices in *Antigone*), he systematically excludes direct divine intervention or communication as a source of valid information. They belong to the realm of superstition or politically motivated hoax, as also in Herodotus. In *Women of Trachis* neither Heracles nor any other character is permitted to know the future event of Heracles' apotheosis. (Sophocles' fastidious rationalism has often caused critics trouble with this lack of reference to an important myth.) Similarly, Philoctetes can only comprehend the significance of his own experience in the island cave after he is transformed and ready to take leave of Lemnos. Thus it is only after Heracles' epiphany that Philoctetes himself utilizes the diction of birth in his farewell to the cave and landscape (see above, n. 23, on the diction of cave, nymphs and male sea-spray).

The arts of the archer-warrior and the arts of the physician are bound still more closely by their common origin from the archetypically civilized god of the polis, Apollo, who was both father of Asclepius and bestower of arms to Heracles. Apollo, Asclepius and the "sons of Asclepius" (a title used generically for fifth century physicians) offer a line of medical "paternity" to match the military lineage marked by transmission of the bow: Apollo, Heracles, Philoctetes and, as a future possibility, Neoptolemus. In these two lines of non-biological paternity one may find Sophocles' increasing interest in replacing the natural bonds of the biological family with the symbolic kinship of democratic citizenship. This theme is most explicitly developed in *Oedipus at Colonus* when Oedipus rejects his own city and curses his own male kin to become instead a figurative kin of Theseus and a figurative ancestor and magical source of blessings to Athens. Similarly in *Philoctetes*, possession of Heracles' arms rather than Achilles' arms seals the inheritance of true aristocratic power.

The conflict between family kinship and civic loyalty and between family and political authority is the dominant fifth century conception of tragic conflict. The force of the historical problem in the transition from aristocratic to democratic society can be seen in *Republic*, where several decades later Plato still finds need to assert that his myth of the family (all guardians are

siblings and children of the state and the natural family is to be abolished) is one of the "three great waves" that would arouse incredulous resistance to the building of a just and viable state. The new Philoctetes, not the old Achilles, is to be the true "father" of Neoptolemus, but they are to march together like a "lion team" (1436). Generational conflict and political factionalism along kinship lines are annihilated in a single heroic image.[53]

The emphasis on language and the bow as the rudiments of *civilized* culture are also important to the resolution of this play. The sophistic Odysseus possesses the supreme facility of language, which he corrupts. The isolated Philoctetes has only his own animal groans and the meaningless echoes from the cliffs. Philoctetes' agonizing need for speech, from fellow humans and from guiding divinity (228,1445), is the most basic manifestation of his painful isolation. His true "wound" is his idiosyncratic sense of self and the isolating rage that separates him from social contact and social communication.

Language is a socializing facility and tool whose real strength is realized only when it is brought into accord with the natural social bond, compassion. Neoptolemus' discovery of compassion within his own nature enables him to establish a fertile bond with Philoctetes. But compassion is beyond the scope of Odysseus ever to learn because it is a deficiency of his nature, just as his nature is deficient in the power needed to wield the bow of Heracles. Odysseus' cooperative mood will extend only as far as external pressures necessitate and blind obedience to authority demands. He perceives no difference between the oracle's pronouncement and his generals' commands. For Odysseus, all words are tools of equal value.

The naturally (and daemonically) heroic Philoctetes, on the other hand, possesses the bow, the instrument of aggression by which man survives and lives as he hunts down his food. As Odysseus has misappropriated language for expedient ends, Philoctetes has misappropriated the bow for his private use. The bow's social and higher civilizing capacity can be brought into play only in the communal struggle of the polis. The individual survives like an animal by eating before being eaten; the polis survives over generations by defeating its enemies, preserving its citizens and progressing. Philoctetes' social death is to be cut off from warfare and, when he has the chance of rejoining, he attempts a symbolic and tragic suicide by cutting himself off from participation in the battle.

The idea that war, even "piously" waged war (1441), can be regarded as a method of civilization and an instrument of progress is not a comfortable one today. Granting the historical context, Athens was an imperial power whose special facility, in its own view, resided in rhetoric and warfare: persuasion among the *philoi* (its compatriots and allies) and forceful conquest of the threatening and less civilized enemies outside its direct sphere of influence. Pericles' "Funeral Oration" in Thucy-

53. This image has a revealing history and provides a vignette of the tragedians' rich dialogue through the abbreviated language of formulaic epic motifs. In the *Iliad* individual heroes are frequently compared to lions or other ravenous predators. The image of two lions occurs, but rarely. It is used for Diomedes and Odysseus (*Il. 10.* 297) as they set out on their famous mission that ends in the deception of Dolon and theft of Rhesus' horses, with both Trojans slaughtered. The team of Diomedes and Odysseus also figures prominently in the Philoctetes story, for example, in the epic *Little Iliad* (Diomedes is sent to trick Neoptolemus into entering the war while Odysseus is sent to trick Philoctetes into reentering) and in the 431 B.C. Euripidean *Philoctetes* (the two together retrieve Philoctetes by deception). Aeschylus in the *Oresteia* of 458 B.C. used the image for Orestes and Pylades (*Ch.* 938), whose mission to murder Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was again accomplished by disguise and deception. The Orestes story served from Homer on as an ancient paradigm for generational conflict. Sophocles' lion team in *Philoctetes* unites the generations for a just and open purpose, a transformation in accord with his reformed rendering of the myth.The image is parodied in Euripides' *Orestes*, which was produced in the year following *Philoctetes*. The killer pair Orestes-Pylades are twice called a "pair of lions" (1401, 1555), and in general the Euripidean play seems heavily allusive to the Sophoclean, aside from obvious correspondences to the *Oresteia*. The sickening scene of Orestes' seizure in the beginning of the Euripides play incorporates many details that parallel those of Philoctetes' seizure. In the *deus ex machina* conclusion, Apollo awards Hermione to Orestes, although "Neoptolemus expects to marry her, but he will never do so, for his fate is to die violently at Delphi" (1654-1656). The isolated reference to Neoptolemus, another third generation hero, would seem gratuitous other than as a reference to Sophocles' choice of the more positive epic tradition regarding Neoptolemus' genetic nobility.

dides and the consistent treatment of the mythic Athenian king Theseus in the late tragedies (for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus* and Euripides' *Suppliant Women*) all make this bias clear. It is a bias that was firmly established in the earlier decades of the century by the Athenian role in the Persian Wars and the success of building Athens into the internationally famous center of a rapidly expanding empire. Aeschylus emphatically celebrates Athens as the leader of the new civilization, and no one observing the cultural and commercial magnetism that the polis exerted in the decades following the defeat of Persia would have seriously contested that title.

The initial division of the two aspects of social power, rhetoric and warfare, between irreconcilably opposed characters is what the action of the *Philoctetes* must resolve. It is the new generation, in the figure of Neoptolemus, who offers a chance to bring together the complementary powers,[54] but without the example and sanction of a mentor, Neoptolemus cannot proceed to a complete education as a new hero. Effective rhetoric can be learned, but to be effective its power must be brought into accord with the proper social instincts. Ultimately even noble rhetoric will fail if the driving energy of the hero remains subverted and frustrated. Effective warfare cannot be learned at all; it is innate to the true hero and constitutes his daemonic power. The mark of the divine strength of Philoctetes' supreme warrior excellence is that only divine speech can persuade him. Human rhetoric may be noble but is not divine. It expresses an attitude,

54. J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, in "Le 'Philoctète' de Sophocle et l'éphébie" (*Mythe et Tragédie en Grèce Ancienne*, 1972) comment that Neoptolemus must mediate between the over-civilized Odysseus and savage Philoctetes because, as ephebe, he is both duty-bound to Odysseus and bound to savage ways by the ephebe initiation ritual (177). In this brief but rich study of *Philoctetes*, the authors argue that adolescent Athenian ephebes, before becoming fully-armed hoplites, were required to enact an ambush in the countryside armed only as savages might be. Neoptolemus' task on Lemnos to capture Philoctetes by treachery would represent such a ritual of initiation and maturation (and an appropriate one for the vision of Lemnos as a primitive and symbolic breeding ground of social customs). This essay also explores the importance of the savage landscape and Philoctetes' "social death" there.

never absolute knowledge. Heracles is the agent who will fill the double need for an exemplar wielding both military and rhetorical power in perfect union and for a single objective.

In each half of the play's movement, the intrusion of the repellent but socially-oriented element of the polis — first the merchant figure and then Odysseus himself, the private and public versions — pushes the movement of the play forward toward solution of the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between "civilized" tactics and daemonic power. The scene of suffering is displaced to the center of the drama because Philoctetes must be moved beyond his private dilemma, isolated physical suffering, to the arena of social conflict and to the recognition that moral suffering, being isolated by one's nobility in an unjust world, is a problem that only the polis as a whole can resolve. The contrary is equally true. Without the solution of the moral dilemma the polis itself cannot progress to a condition of more advanced civilization. The scene of suffering provides a parallel function to the *deus ex machina* conclusion. Both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus learn that the disease and its consequent physical isolation are a lesser obstacle than the moral problem confronting the two noble men. Philoctetes and Neoptolemus can come to a private understanding, but the ethical conflicts that divide the society into warring groups are resolved only by the Heracles scene at the end.

Roughly midway through the play, before Philoctetes' seizure, the chorus sings a prophetic ode (676 ff.), balancing the later true prophecy of Heracles. The choral ode defines Philoctetes' predicament as an isolation from the great gifts that culture offers to man: the social gifts of compassion and healing medicine and the nutritive gifts of grain and wine. The song begins with Ixion, who unsuccessfully attempted to unite with divinity forcibly and physically through rape of the goddess Hera and who suffered unending torment. It ends with Heracles, who successfully entered the realm of the gods as a reward for virtuous life devoted to civilizing labor. These are the poles of failure and success, criminality and justice, which guide men to survival and lasting achievement.

Philoctetes in his isolation is not truly self-sufficient although

physically he can survive. He is thus in the paradoxical position of being the new culture hero who is himself deprived of the contributions of the earlier culture heroes. Yet only the artisan who knows his material can properly elicit its potential and work it into its perfect and most effective form. Philoctetes' material is nature, his own nature and the island nature that provides him his survival. Philoctetes' history has brought him into contact with elemental and wild natural forces, aggressive moral rage and aggressive physical survival. These are the basic materials, the vital energy, that is organized and controlled by civilization to achieve its creative force. Without them a civilization and society have no life, no existence. Civilization always implies an enemy that must be dominated. In a pattern familiar from the stories of Heracles and other mediators between the savage world of nature and the civilized realm of the polis, Philoctetes has become the savage civilizer and the civilized savage.

For all his acceptance of the social goals of obedience, authority and communal will, and of the rhetoric that formalizes them, the Odysseus of the Sophoclean play does not have this rudimentary and innate power nor the capacity ever to learn it. Philoctetes alone, as he boasts to Neoptolemus, has had the power to endure and learn (534-538). He has survived and become dangerously assimilated to the wild landscape and his own wild wound, as Neoptolemus accuses (1321). Only this physically grotesque and apparently feral man can preserve and even advance the level of humanity, specifically Athenian humanity, one step closer to human perfection, which is its potentially divine nature. To do so, he must be willing to ameliorate and civilize his own angry and bestial nature.

The benefits of what Philoctetes has earned with his own flesh will be passed on to the next generation without the necessity of its reliving the grotesque suffering needed to achieve them. Philoctetes' motivating drive is a disease of anger to match his physical strength; Neoptolemus, representing the next generation, expresses his vicarious association with that power as compassion. Similarly, the scene of Philoctetes' suffering invokes the final tortures of Heracles, but Philoctetes need not experience Heracles' horrible burning death just as Neoptolemus need not experience Philoctetes' bestial agony and isolation. This is how civilization progresses.

In the first movement of the drama, Philoctetes is restored to physical life, although with his wound uncured and his bow gone, it is a minimal life. The second movement concludes with restoration of a minimal social existence to Philoctetes as Neoptolemus prepares to take him home to his family. But Philoctetes remains severed from a meaningful social context, just as physically he will be doomed to an incurable wound and morally he will be doomed to a neurotic existence of frustrated anger. In every respect he looks forward to wasting away. Only in the third, coda-like movement of the play does Philoctetes look forward to a life of significance as the Heraclean world of the transcendent social hero is revealed. The life of the hero, the life of the community and the life of the future generation are given a new point of view and potential for forward progression out of stagnating and hopeless conflicts of the impasse. In the eyes of the Athenian public, Heracles' divinity was not compromised by all the ambiguous savagery of his myths, and, according to Sophocles, Philoctetes' heroism will not be compromised by the ambiguous tactics of his society.

The story of the Sophoclean Philoctetes is the story of the birth of a new nobility and a new type of hero. It has the elements of both the traditional tragedies and the traditional comedies, which are played against one another in such a way as to expose the fact that neither is sufficient to describe the new historical realities or, more importantly, the new comprehension of that reality. The model that Sophocles chooses is ironically, but not uncharacteristically for Greek thought, the most archaic and therefore most potent of all.

If the comic resolution qualifies the way in which one perceives Philoctetes' heroism, Philoctetes' heroic nature reciprocally qualifies the comic resolution. In a fully comic resolution there is the expectation that one of several events will accompany the restoration: the contaminating villain is somehow segregated (expelled or punished), the villain is reformed, or his

villainy is shown to be not truly evil but simply a petty, even humorous, delinquency. In the *Philoctetes,* none of these events takes place. Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are reformed, one in his nature and the other in his judgement, but Odysseus remains the same, an improper and corrupt nature wedded to a divine plan. There is no suggestion that the continuous indictment of Odysseus as base is vitiated by the drama's surprising conclusion, and happy though one may be over Philoctetes' and the Greeks' good fortune, there is nothing to laugh over in Odysseus. That possibility as well has been laid aside with the relinquishing of the heroic age.

The activist and politic Odysseus must be taken seriously because he too is needed. A lingering sense of unease remains at the end of the drama. Odysseus and his ilk are a part of this civilized society and are here to stay, at least into the foreseeable future. And further, they are needed as catalysts so long as their more aristocratic counterparts balk at entering the arena of political and military action. This means, in turn, an urgent and continuing need for heroes of the Philoctetes mold, embodying a corrective energy to watch over the polis as the spirit of Oedipus does in the grove of Colonus (which is the precinct from which the 411 B.C. oligarchical revolution was staged). The dialectic will continue as long as Odysseus does.

No matter how carefully and completely one defines the role of Heracles and the dramatic preparation for the *deus ex machina* coda, the question of audience conviction remains. If no one today can agree on the meaning of the resolution, that is a sure sign that it is not a very convincing one to us. Intellectual rationales are debatable and, in any case, cannot create theatrical effectiveness in a drama.

The structure of rapid and surprising relief to the crisis seems related to the structure of repetitively frustrated action through the earlier scenes. This is presumably what bothers us, so many convolutions and problems so rapidly dispensed with, and without explanation. In Heracles' pronouncement and in Philoctetes' farewell to his island, there is no explanatory reference to the Neoptolemus remains mum and Odysseus remains offstage. The question again arises as to why, if Sophocles desired a romance conclusion, or knew he would be forced into it by the myth, he constantly obstructed it in his plot rather than facilitating and providing some meaning for it from within the drama itself.

From this point of view, the division of the drama into two halves, each culminating in paralytic crisis, is particularly problematic. When the deceptive Neoptolemus holds the gullible Philoctetes in his grasp, should the audience respond, giving way to its habitual expectations as a tragic audience, with a desire for the hero to keep his fate and the plot in his own hands? Or should it respond, giving way to its habitual expectations as a comic audience, with a desire for the successful conclusion of the deceit plot and the forced rehabilitation of Philoctetes?

When, in the second half of the play, the issue of deception is closed and the action turns to open conflict, the problem of dramatic response is in no way resolved but becomes even more difficult. Should the audience be satisfied that Philoctetes stands firm and has prevailed? That Neoptolemus might have been an Achilles in another age? That Philoctetes' fellow-Greeks will be destroyed? These are wrenching questions. If one isn't certain of what is actually going on, who can be pleased either with the confirmation of Philoctetes' tragic nature or the confirmation of the romance voyage home? The crisis in genre, where both comic and tragic demands are partly but not completely satisfied, is reinforced by a dilemma of judgement. The right people still want the wrong things and the wrong people are still on the right side. That seems to be the blunder that Sophocles has been making throughout the drama.

Further, what *is* going on isn't what is supposed to be going on, and that must also have disconcerted the original audience. There were a few basic facts of each myth that were not subject to alteration, however one manipulated the characterizations and plot complications, and Philoctetes' cure and success at Troy were among them. Everyone knows who won the Second World War, and everyone in the Athenian theatre knew that the

exit lines of Neoptolemus' and Philoctetes' last verses at the end of the second movement is an awareness that something different is still supposed to happen. But again, the problem surmounts the frustration of even genre or plot expectation. Does one want something different to happen? Would it be desirable to see Philoctetes somehow forced to Troy? It's good for Odysseus and Neoptolemus (drawn together again), but is it good for Philoctetes and the theatre? To paraphrase Dionysus' comments at the end of *Frogs* about the problematic restoration of Alcibiades: one yearns for it, one detests it, and one wants to have it all the same — it's a difficult birth.

There is a peculiar sense of reality to this drama, despite all its paraphernalia of desert islands, magical bow, and divine epiphany. The reality is not in the story pattern but in the pattern of confused information, ambivalent objectives, and unexpected reversals. To the extent that such confusions and frustrations conform to real experience, the psychological effects elicited by the drama are familiar ones. The question of distinguishing historical truth from historical falsehood is no more definitively solved by *Philoctetes* than it is in the real world. The problem of eliminating one's political enemies and their corrupt tactics is no more solved that it is in the real world. Falsely clean divisions are what we expect and want from stories because we don't have them in life. Our human perception is as obstructed by inadequate information as it is by inadequate comprehension of the confused and limited information we do have. Certainly, as the late fifth century authors testify, human perception is not capable of predicting either military or political victories in any society. But in times of extreme pressure, in political revolution and wartime, decisions become as critical as they are correspondingly difficult to make. Whether or not one knows what is best or what one desires and fears most, the willingness to act becomes imperative because survival is at stake.

All these crises had entangled Athens in 409 B.C. The important point, however, is not what we now perceive to have been happening then, but how the citizens of 409 perceived their own predicament. The newly evolving perception, evident throughout

literary works of the period, was of a polis being torn apart by political conflict while an uncertain war was being waged for control of the remnant Eastern Aegean empire and the imperative Hellespont passage to the Black Sea resources. The rhetorical and demagogic excesses of the Assembly were matched by the uncertain communications in time of war, and there seemed to be a general feeling that irrational loyalty was about as reasonable, or at least as common, a motivation for political judgement and alignment as any. For the intellectuals, at least, Sophistic theories of scepticism, themselves certainly promoted by the historical events of the period, made the intellectual basis for judgement as dubious as the information on which it was based.

With the destruction of the Athenian fleet in Sicily in 413 B.C. Athens had suffered the worst setback of its largest and most aggressive venture in nineteen years of war. Contrary to its own and all its enemies' expectations, in 410 B.C. it had recouped its forces sufficiently to win major and promising victories in the new arena of war, the Hellespont. In 411-410 B.C., in the space of roughly one year, Athens was governed under four successive constitutions: a democratic constitution overthrown by an oligarchical coup, a more moderate oligarchic constitution forced by certain of the oligarchical factions as well as the democrats, and an extreme democratic constitution, "restored" under the threat that the seceded navy would sail into the Piraeus and take over its own city by force. By the end of 410 B.C., open civil war had been averted and Alcibiades was leading the navy to victories in the Hellespont.

Ambivalence, confusion, and frustration all create an *erōs* for resolution. If there is any prospect that the resolution might be a positive one, hope, according to Athenian psychological theory, will lead man willingly into the unknown. The greater the intensity of anxiety and ambivalence that the audience brought into the Theatre of Dionysus in 409 B.C., the more convincing and liberating Sophocles' resolution would have seemed. In this sense, the experience of the drama is cathartic. It is also educational. The desire for solution breeds a willingness to see the value of new or previously unconvincing solutions, and a

solution that induces powerful religious feelings will be that much more sanctioned.

Psychologically, the epiphany conclusion follows as a response to an analogous perception of contemporary events that the audience brings into the theatre. The dramatic dilemma, by reproducing the contemporary perception of the historical dilemma, has drawn vicariously on the energy of that perception and on the desire for its solution to effect a resolution for the drama. If the dramatic resolution is effective, it will in turn suggest an altered perception of the historical dilemma and therefore an altered perception of what is required for its possible solution. What Sophocles seems to have attempted in *Philoctetes* is to lead his audience to the experience of conversion.

Dramatically, the dilemma is created by the vacillation between tragic and comic motifs. The confusion of genres reproduces the confusions of contemporary experience. Following the initial frustration of the picaresque comic plot because of Philoctetes' horrible seizure and Neoptolemus' compassionate honesty, a series of alternative solutions are tried out and rejected: attempted suicide (tragic but frustrated); theft of bow (comic) and abandonment of hero (tragic); restoration of bow (comic) and failed persuasion of hero (tragic). Only the return home has the power to conclude the romance story with Philoctetes' heroic purity intact, but it compromises both plot and character. It is a concluding structure without a true sense of ending: the Greeks are left to defeat and Philoctetes is to be deprived of cure (comic necessity) and the confirmation of glory (tragic necessity).

Neither pure romance nor pure tragedy is a "realistic" plot form. Each demands a highly selective view of character and action in order to confirm the plot structure dictated by its distinctive resolution. By reducing the villainous Odysseus and his contaminating world to the status of antagonistic catalyst rather than successful master, the way has been prepared for the perceptions of romance and tragedy to be brought into line. The impotence of Odysseus' presumed "realism" is suggested by its necessary elimination from both the romance and tragic structures, but the convergence of romance and tragic narratives will

remain confused and unconvincing unless heroes and audience are provided the means to create an effective solution and an effective conclusion from that convergence. Known tragic and comic forms, each with its idiosyncratic organization of experience, offer a variety of endings but no full resolution. The introduction of Heracles in the final scene, with its new perception of the religious significance of the hero simultaneously providing a romance "discovery" and tragic "recognition", draws together the two structures. That ending will be validated if it is perceived by its audience to provide a convincing resolution to the problems raised by the drama.

All this is to say that if literary works are judged by their survival merit, *Philoctetes* is a dated play. To whatever degree its renewed popularity in our time suggests a renewed perception of political and historical events in the context of scepticism, corruption and irreconcilable conflict, no culture can take another culture's gods at face value, and the energy to make the *Philoctetes* resolution convincing very much depends on a particular response, not only to the preceding events of the drama, but to the swift and unreflecting perception that a known and revered figure can miraculously lift one over the impasse through the force of one's reverence for him.

In a more general sense, late fifth century literature shows a heightened awareness of the critical nature of real historical time. New historical forces have come into play that, as Thucydides says, require a devastatingly new and complete reassessment, not only of the present, but also of the past. The works of this period are written as if their authors realized that they were living in an age that we would now call an historical watershed. The dramatic setting of Plato's *Symposium* in 416 B.C. confirms a precise historical moment at which its author, retrospectively, places the birth of a new philosophy induced by the need and *erōs* for a solution to the conflicting perception of a true reality that both comedy and tragedy attempted to define but neither could resolve. On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition Socrates is left to expound the potential convergence of the two traditional literary models while his audience of comic poet and tragic poet

falls asleep as the new day dawns. The relationship between Sophocles' religious resolution, in the wake of the failed expedition's disastrous political consequences, and Plato's retrospective philosophical solution is suggestive and tantalizing.

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* acknowledges that real historical time, with its flux and contradictions, destroys the possibility of a pure tragic vision. The tragic hero, by nature, cannot assimilate to change and contradiction. In the world of this play there is no longer a role for the traditional model of tragic action and tragic hero. The archaic way of Achilles has lost its effectiveness and will no longer serve the new polis but, at the same time, the new attitudes and the new hero Odysseus are insufficient to solve the crisis because they cannot grasp the realities at stake. There needs to be some new model, some new perception of the present reality, that can solve the historical impasse and lead the future. The old Heracles, seen from a new point of view with a newly acquired religious significance, is what Sophocles offers.

Lemnos is a limbo, an island landscape adrift between the realms of polis and battlefield. In this setting the conflicts of politics and war play themselves out before our eyes and, at the same time, acquire a new life to move forward and drive a solution in both worlds, first the war and then the polis. War is a necessary and prior stage from which the polis will, presumably, find strength to draw itself together in the knowledge and experience of shared effort. Once the pressures of war have subsided and the energies of killing have been discharged onto their proper objective, those powerful energies of the citizens will realign themselves to bind the restored and reformed polis.

The healing of Philoctetes and the polis can be effected only through the proper sequence of events and the process of time. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* asserts what should happen, but the future is still in the realm of the curative Asclepian dream, in the immanence of prophecy and mystical epiphany, and in the fantasy of a tragi-comic resolution. The future is waiting to be born from the womb of potentiality into history.

"Εξ' Οικείων τα Βέλη: Η Αμφισβήτηση του Κλασικού μέσω της Θεατρικότητας στον Φιλοκτήτη των Αντρέ Ζιντ, Αλφόνσο Σάστρε και Τζον Τζέζουρουν"[1]

Χριστίνα Ντόκου*

Η παρούσα συγκριτική περιδιάβαση στο αρχαιοελληνικό και παγκόσμιο σύγχρονο θέατρο ξεκινά όχι με μία αυλαία, αλλά με ένα…τραπεζομάντηλο: συγκεκριμένα, ένα ωραιότατο «καλό» τραπεζομάντηλο, υφασμένο στο χέρι από την πρό-πρόγιαγιά μου για το προικιό της, το οποίο μου κληροδοτήθηκε περνώντας από γενιά σε γενιά. Η μητέρα μου, ως καλή νοικοκυρά και αντιλαμβανόμενη την ευθύνη του να έχει στα χέρια της ένα οικογενειακό κειμήλιο περίπου 200 χρονών, το διαφύλαξε όλα αυτά τα χρόνια όπως ακριβώς το είχαν φυλάξει και οι προγόνισσές της: μονίμως διπλωμένο σε χαρτί στο συρτάρι, με λεβάντα, και μία φορά το χρόνο το έβγαζε, το έπλενε στο χέρι, το σιδέρωνε με Μέριτο, και το…ξαναέβαζε άθικτο στο συρτάρι. Εγώ πάλι, στο πρώτο πάρτι που έκανα στο σπίτι, έστρωσα το τραπεζομάντιλο στο τραπέζι του σαλονιού, ρίξαμε πάνω σάλτσες, κρασιά, λάδια, και τα λοιπά, και μετά το έβαλα στο πλυντήριο, λευκά πολύ λερωμένα, και βγήκε απαστράπτον! Το χρησιμοποιώ από τότε τακτικότατα, σκεπτόμενη ότι μάλλον αυτό θα ζήσει περισσότερο από εμένα, και επειδή θεώρησα πως ένα τόσο καλοϋφασμένο στρωσίδι, από αγνό βαμβάκι και με πολλή τέχνη, είναι ποιοτικά φτιαγμένο για ν' αντέχει τη χρήση– και όντως, έτσι το χαίρονται και το καμαρώνουν όλοι οι καλεσμένοι μου.

Τι σχέση έχει αυτό με το Φιλοκτήτη; Το θέμα του παρόντος άρθρου, όντας συγκριτολογικό, αναπόφευκτα τοποθετείται σε μία διαμάχη που κατά κάποιο τρόπο ορίζει τη σύγχρονη μελέτη της κλασικής μας κληρονομιάς, αλλά και την νεοελληνική ταυτότητά μας. Το ερώτημα είναι το αν και κατά πόσο μπορούμε να χρησιμοποιούμε ελεύθερα τα ιερά και όσια κειμήλια της παράδοσής μας—λόγου χάρη, αν και κατά πόσο μπορεί ένα σύγχρονο λογοτεχνικό κείμενο να επέμβει πάνω σε ένα κλασικό, και τι δικαιώματα τροποποίησης, ερμηνείας ή και παρ-ερμηνείας μπορούμε ως σύγχρονοι συγγραφείς ή αναγνώστες να έχουμε πάνω στα μεγάλα κλασικά έργα της αρχαιότητας, εφόσον πάντα παραμονεύει το ρίσκο της «αλλοίωσης» του πρωτότυπου και της φθοράς της αξίας ή του νοήματός του. Και μιλάμε για έργα μοναδικά, κληρονομιά όλης της ανθρωπότητας, κάπως πιο πολύτιμα από ένα τραπεζομάντιλο. Το ερώτημα γίνεται ακόμα πιο επείγον αν το θεωρήσουμε σε σχέση με μία άλλη, παρόμοιας δομής απορία που συνόψισε πρόσφατα ο Τάκης Θεοδωρόπουλος σε στήλη της *Καθημερινής*, με αφορμή τη διδασκαλία της αρχαιοελληνικής γραμ-

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1. Το κείμενο αυτό δόθηκε αρχικά με τη μορφή διάλεξης στα πλαίσια του ετήσιου σεμιναρίου Θεατρολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών (εαρινός κύκλος 2013), μετά από ευγενική πρόσκληση της Καθηγήτριας κας Μαρίκας Θωμαδάκη.

του Κλασικού
τη των Αντρέ
ζουρουν"[1]

Χριστίνα Ντόκου*

αγκόσμιο σύγχρονο θέ-
υγκεκριμένα, ένα ωραι-
ό-πρόγιαγιά μου για το
ε γενιά. Η μητέρα μου,
στα χέρια της ένα οικο-
α χρόνια όπως ακριβώς
ρτί στο συρτάρι, με λε-
ιδέρωνε με Μέριτο, και
ι που έκανα στο σπίτι,
πάνω σάλτσες, κρασιά,
ύ λερωμένα, και βγήκε
νη ότι μάλλον αυτό θα
αλοϋφασμένο στρωσίδι,
ια ν' αντέχει τη χρήση–
νοι μου.
ρθρου, όντας συγκριτο-
ιο τρόπο ορίζει τη σύγ-
ιληνική ταυτότητά μας.
ιούμε ελεύθερα τα ιερά
ι πόσο μπορεί ένα σύγ-
ι δικαιώματα τροποποί-
γγραφείς ή αναγνώστες
σον πάντα παραμονεύει
ίας ή του νοήματός του.
ας, κάπως πιο πολύτιμα
/ αν το θεωρήσουμε σε
ατα ο Τάκης Θεοδωρό-
αρχαιοελληνικής γραμ-

γίας του Θεάτρου
σιου σεμιναρίου Θεατρολο-
ρόσκληση της Καθηγήτριας

ματείας στα σχολεία με τρόπο εύληπτο και ενδιαφέροντα: «Το ζητούμενο είναι αν κάποιους τους απασχολεί πώς θα διδαχθούν αυτά τα κείμενα. Αν μπορούν να τα καθαρίσουν από τη μάκα του φορμαλισμού και αν έχουν τη διαύγεια, την ικανότητα και το θάρρος να τα διδάξουν ως κείμενα και όχι ως αφορμές για να προβάλουν τις δικές τους απόψεις» (15).

Ο Φιλοκτήτης προσφέρεται ιδιαιτέρως για μία τέτοια επισκόπιση, καθώς είναι ένας χαρακτήρας της μυθολογίας, όπως τον έχουμε γνωρίσει από την όψιμη τραγωδία του Σοφοκλή του 409 π.Χ., που στις σύγχρονες επανεγγραφές του φαίνεται να κερδίζει όλο και περισσότερο, ίσως επειδή η περίπτωση του Φιλοκτήτη συγκεντρώνει όλα εκείνα τα χαρακτηριστικά του περιθωριοποιημένου, του απόκληρου, του μεγαλειώδους καταραμένου, που στα μάτια μας από την εποχή του Ρομαντισμού το 19ο αιώνα και έπειτα φαίνονται πολύ σαγηνευτικά. Άλλωστε, αυτά τα χαρακτηριστικά έφερε στο προσκήνιο στον 20ο αιώνα με υποδειγματικό τρόπο το δοκίμιο του *Edmund Wilson The Wound and the Bow* [*Η Πληγή και το Τόξο*], στο οποίο ο Φιλοκτήτης αναγνωρίζεται ως η εμβληματική φιγούρα του μυθοπλάστη συγγραφέα που μετουσιώνει τον υπαρξιακό του πόνο σε δημιουργία. Επομένως εδώ έχουμε μία περίπτωση όπου τα όρια μεταξύ κλασικού και σύγχρονου θολώνουν συναρπαστικά: μας αρέσει ο Φιλοκτήτης επειδή είναι κλασικός, ή μας αρέσει επειδή μας μοιάζει σύγχρονος; Και στο κάτω-κάτω της γραφής, η έννοια του κλασικού δεν είναι αυτή του ότι ένα κείμενο ή ένα έργο τέχνης συνεχίζει να αρέσει παρά το πέρασμα των αιώνων; Ο πολύ ωραίος ορισμός που έδωσε ο θεωρητικός και μελετητής του φολκλόρ Jack Zipes για το μύθο άλλωστε λέει απλά ότι μύθος είναι αυτό που αξίζει να διαδοθεί στις επόμενες γενιές ("Tales Worth Telling"). Κι αυτό που θα ήθελα να υποστηρίξω απόψε με την επισκόπησή μου είναι ότι ακόμα και οι πιο ακραίες επανεγγραφές του μύθου που φαίνονται μέχρι και να αντιμάχονται ευθέως τις αξίες του, αφενός ορμώνται από σπερματικά στοιχεία που ενυπάρχουν στο ίδιο το αρχαίο κείμενο, αφετέρου ουσιαστικά, εφόσον πηγάζουν από έναν ειλικρινή διάλογο με το μύθο, καταλήγουν να ενδυναμώνουν το παλαιότερο κείμενο και, μέσα από ένα τεστ κοπώσεως-αμφισβήτισης, να αναδεικνύουν με νέα μάτια αυτά ακριβώς τα στοιχεία του που αξίζει να διαδοθούν, τις κλασικές λεγόμενες αξίες που είναι και η πραγματική πολύτιμη κληρονομιά μας.

Και μιλώντας για τεστ κοπώσεως, ας θυμηθούμε την ιστορία του Φιλοκτήτη, του οποίου οι αντοχές δοκιμάστηκαν περισσότερο και από του ομηρικού Οδυσσέα. Σύμφωνα με την *Κυπρία* του Στασινού, το *Ιλίου πέρσις* του Αρκτίνου του Μιλήσιου και τη *Μικρή Ιλιάδα* του Λέσχη του Μυτιληναίου, τις πηγές για το μύθο που διέσωσε ο Πρόκλος (Jebb), ο Φιλοκτήτης ο Μαλιεύς, γιός του πρώην Αργοναύτη και βασιλιά της Θεσσαλίας Ποίαντα, ήταν ένας από τους ήρωες των Αχαιών που εκστράτευσαν για τον Τρωϊκό Πόλεμο. Φημισμένος τοξότης, έγινε κληρονόμος του περίφημου τόξου του Ηρακλή, του οποίου τα βέλη, ποτισμένα με το φαρμάκι της Λερναίας Ύδρας, δεν λάθευαν ποτέ και σκότωναν ακαριαία. Στο δρόμο για την Τροία, ο στόλος των Ελλήνων στάθμευσε σε ένα νησάκι κοντά στη Λήμνο, όπου θέλησαν να κάνουν μια θυσία στην τοπική θεά, την Χρύση. Είτε από ατυχία, είτε επειδή άθελά του προσέβαλε την θεά, τον Φιλοκτήτη τον δάγκωσε στο πόδι το φίδι που φυλούσε το βωμό—άλλες εκδοχές (Υγίνος 102, Σέρβιος ΙΙΙ.402) λένε ότι η Ήρα έστειλε το φίδι ή έκανε να πέσει στο πόδι του ένα από τα δηλητηριασμένα Ηράκλεια βέλη της φαρέτρας του, ως εκδίκηση για τη βοήθεια του Φιλοκτήτη προς τον μισητό της Ηρακλή—και η πληγή μολύνθηκε και έγινε μία αγιάτρευτη φαγέδαινα που πυορροούσε, μύριζε αφόρητα, και του

προκαλούσε κρίσεις φριχτού πόνου. Μην αντέχοντας το θέαμα και τις κραυγές, που έριχναν το ηθικό του στρατεύματος, οι αρχηγοί των Αχαιών πείστηκαν από τον Οδυσσέα να εγκαταλείψουν τον Φιλοκτήτη και να σαλπάρουν για Τροία. Σε κάποιες εκδοχές του μύθου (λ.χ. Ευστάθιος Ιl.724) τον αφήνουν στο θεραπευτήριο της Λήμνου, όπου οι κάτοικοι όμως τον αποστρέφονται και τον αγνοούν, στην τραγωδία του Σοφοκλή όμως ο Φιλοκτήτης περνά 10 χρόνια στη Λήμνο σε μια σπηλιά υποφέροντας κατάμονος, αβοήθητος, σερνάμενος και τοξεύοντας πουλιά για να μην πεθάνει της πείνας. Όμως στο 10 χρόνο ο αιχμαλωτισμένος Τρώας μάντης Έλενος προφητεύει ότι οι Έλληνες δεν θα πάρουν την Τροία χωρίς το νεαρό γιο του Αχιλλέα, τον Νεοπτόλεμο, τον οποίο φέρνουν από τη Σκύρο, και τα όπλα του Φιλοκτήτη, οπότε πρέπει κάπως ο Φιλοκτήτης να πειστεί να επανενταχθεί. Στη Σοφόκλεια εκδοχή, οι Έλληνες στέλνουν τον πανούργο Οδυσσέα και τον Νεοπτόλεμο στην αποστολή. Ο Οδυσσέας πείθει τον άπειρο Νεοπτόλεμο να προσεγγίσει εκείνος τον Φιλοκτήτη, με πρόσχημα ότι μισεί κι αυτός του Αχαιούς γιατί έδωσαν τα όπλα του νεκρού πατέρα του στον Οδυσσέα, και να του πάρει το φονικό τόξο με δόλο. Ο Νεοπτόλεμος όμως, παρακινούμενος τόσο από την φιλοτιμία του, που δεν αντέχει τη δόλια νίκη, όσο και από το οικτρό θέαμα του εξαθλιωμένου Φιλοκτήτη που τον πιστεύει και τον εκλιπαρεί για βοήθεια, αποκαλύπτει στον γερασμένο ερημίτη την απάτη και συναινεί να τον μεταφέρει στο βασίλειό του να πεθάνει με αξιοπρέπεια, έστω κι αν αυτό θα εξοργίσει σίγουρα όλο το ελληνικό στράτευμα. Την κρίσιμη στιγμή του αδιεξόδου εμφανίζεται ο από μηχανής θεός, το φάντασμα του θεοποιημένου Ηρακλή, και προστάζει το Φιλοκτήτη να πάει στην Τροία οικειοθελώς, όπου θα γιατρευτεί και μετά θα δοξαστεί στην άλωση της πόλης. Η *Μικρή Ιλιάδα* μας λέει ότι όντως ο θεραπευμένος Φιλοκτήτης σκοτώνει σε μονομαχία τοξοβολίας τον Πάρη, τον τελευταίο υπερασπιστή της Τροίας.

Τέλος καλό, όλα καλά λοιπόν; Όχι ακριβώς, Όπως παρατηρεί ο κλασσικιστής R. L. Lind στην εισαγωγή του στην αγγλική μετάφραση του δράματος, ο «Φιλοκτήτης» είναι μία προβληματική τραγωδία: "Ο Φιλοκτήτης έχει μόνο μία σκληρή επιλογή μεταξύ του να κρατηθεί από την ξεροκέφαλη περηφάνια του και να πεθάνει αργά και βασανιστικά ή να επιστρέψει στην Τροία» με τους Έλληνες που μισεί (Sophocles 158). Αντιμέτωπος με αυτό το δίλημμα και με τις επιταγές της μυθικής έκβασης της ιστορίας, ο Σοφοκλής με τον από μηχανής Ηρακλή δίνει ένα τέλος που ανατρέπει αυθαίρετα την εξέλιξη της πλοκής, αναιρώντας την άρνηση του ηρωϊκού Φιλοκτήτη χωρίς καμία δικαιολογία. Επίσης οδηγεί τον ήρωα να εμπλακεί σε έναν πόλεμο που αντιτίθεται σε όλα του τα εξόριστα αντιπολεμικά πιστεύω και θα οδηγήσει τον νεαρό, αγνό Νεοπτόλεμο στην ατίμωση, καθώς θα μείνει στην ιστορία ως αυτός που έσφαξε κτηνωδώς τον ανήμπορο γέροντα Πρίαμο κατά την άλωση της Τροίας, αναιρώντας την προηγούμενη συμπόνοια του προς τον εξίσου ανήμπορο Φιλοκτήτη. Ο ήρωας της *Οδύσσειας* πάλι, και στο Σοφοκλή και στα χαμένα ομότιτλα δράματα των Αισχύλου και Ευριπίδη, εμφανίζεται ως πανούργος και δειλός, μία εκμαυλιστική παρουσία ρεαλπολιτίκ αμοραλισμού που απηχεί τη γενικότερη απονιά των Αχαιών στην περίπτωση του μύθου, αλλά και τη ζημιά που είχαν κάνει στην εποχή του Σοφοκλή στα Αθηναϊκά ήθη οι σοφιστές με τον σχετικισμό τους. Ο κλασικιστής Norman Austin, μάλιστα, στο πρόσφατο σπουδαίο βιβλίο του (2011) Ο *Φιλοκτήτης και η Μεγάλη Ληστεία της Ψυχής*–τίτλος που υπογραμμίζει ακριβώς την προβληματικότητα του συγκεκριμένου έργου–δεν διστάζει να αποκαλέσει τον Οδυσσέα σε αυτό το έργο «έναν αποτυχημένο ρήτορα της δε-

κάρας» και μό
μεταφραστής
ως «ενός παλα
γόμενα»). Τέλ
τραγικοί είναι
το οποίο, με τι
ή διδακτική ση
Προμηθέα. Ακ
αυθαίρετα και
οργανικότητα

Τα ερωτήμ
ανά τους αιών
λοκτήτη. Στα
αριθμό έργων,
κόσμιας θεατρ
του Ιρλανδού
μανού Heiner
para *Filoktetes*
επικό Omeros
στεθούν κι άλλ
σκληρό *The Si*
Mandel, ο δρα
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μένος Φιλοκτή
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iloctetes at Le
που απλά προ
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με την πηγή τ
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παντός από «

κάρας» και μάλιστα «εξαιτίας του χαρακτήρα του» (32), άποψη που συμμερίζεται και ο μεταφραστής του Σοφοκλή, Γιώργος Μπλανάς, δίνοντάς μας το πορτρέτο του Οδυσσέα ως «ενός παλαιού καθάρματος της πολιτικής και αριστοτέχνη της εξόντωσης» («Προλεγόμενα»). Τέλος, ένα μεγάλο κενό του αρχικού μύθου με το οποίο παλεύουν και οι κλασικοί τραγικοί είναι ότι καμία εξήγηση δεν δίνεται για το δεκάχρονο μαρτύριο του Φιλοκτήτη, το οποίο, με την βιαστική αποκατάστασή του, απογυμνώνεται και από οποιαδήποτε ηθική ή διδακτική σημασία, σε αντίθεση με, π.χ., το μαρτύριο ενός Οιδίποδα, ενός Αίαντα, ή ενός Προμηθέα. Ακόμα και αν δεχτούμε ότι στο αρχαιοελληνικό πλαίσιο σκέψης οι θεοί δρουν αυθαίρετα και τυραννικά, η τραγωδία αφήνει ερωτήματα αισθητικής φύσης ως προς την οργανικότητα της πλοκής.

Τα ερωτήματα αυτά λοιπόν αποτέλεσαν τα ερεθίσματα που οδήγησαν στη συγγραφή, ανά τους αιώνες, μίας μικρής αλλά γενικά αξιόλογης ομάδας θεατρικών με θέμα τον Φιλοκτήτη. Στα πλαίσια της πολυετούς έρευνάς μου για το θέμα έχω εντοπίσει έναν ικανό αριθμό έργων, πάνω από 20, που περιλαμβάνουν, μεταξύ άλλων, αριστουργήματα της παγκόσμιας θεατρογραφίας και ποίησης όπως το *The Cure at Troy* [*Η Γιατρειά στην Τροία*] του Ιρλανδού Seamus Heaney, το *Philoctete* του Γάλλου André Gide, το *Philoktet* του Γερμανού Heiner Müller, το *Philoktetes* του Αμερικανού John Jesurun, το Demasiado Tarde para *Filoktetes* [*Πολύ Αργά για τον Φιλοκτήτη*] του Ισπανού Alfonso Sastre, και φυσικά το επικό Omeros του Καρριβιανού Νομπελίστα Ντέρεκ Ουώλκοττ. Σε αυτά μπορουν να προστεθούν κι άλλα έργα λιγότερο διάσημα που αξίζουν όμως μελέτης, όπως το Κισσινγκερικά σκληρό *The Summoning of Philoctetes* [*Η Κλήτευση του Φιλοκτήτη*] του Αμερικανού Oscar Mandel, ο δραματικός ποιητικός μονόλογος *Φιλοκτήτης* του Γιάννη Ρίτσου, το μυθιστόρημα *An Arrow's Flight* [*Η Τροχιά Ενός Βέλους*] του Αμερικανού Mark Merlis, *ο Πληγωμένος Φιλοκτήτης* της Δανέζας Έλσα Γκρες, καθώς και έργα άνευ καλλιτεχνικής σημασίας, όπως το *Philoctetes in Lemnos* [*Ο Φιλοκτήτης στη Λήμνο*] του Thomas Monro (μία τραγωδία του 1795 που θα μπορούσε να περιγραφεί ως ένα μπαρόκ «Άρλεκιν»), ή ο βαρετός *Philoctetes at Lemnos* [*Φιλοκτήτης στη Λήμνο*] του J. E. Nesmith, ένα μίνι ποιητικό δράμα που απλά προσπαθεί να αντιγράψει ανεπιτυχώς τα εμπνευσμένα από την ελληνική μυθολογία αριστουργήματα του Λόρδου Tennyson. Κι αυτά τα έργα είναι όσα αναφέρονται στον Φιλοκτήτη με το όνομα, χωρίς να υπολογίσουμε τα πάμπολλα έργα–όπως τα αντιρατσιστικά μυθιστορήματα *Apex Hides the Hurt* [*Ο Άιπεξ Κρύβει τον Πόνο Του*] του Colson Whitehead και *Meridian* της γνωστής συγγραφέως και ακτιβίστριας Alice Walker, η ταινία *Castaway* [*Ναυαγός*] του Robert Zemekis, το επαναστατικό θεατρικό Sherka του Ιρλανδού Sydney B. Smith–που αναφέρονται στο χαρακτήρα αυτόν εμμέσως.

Ποια όμως είναι η περαιτέρω σχέση αυτών των φερόμενων ως απόγονων του Φιλοκτήτη με την πηγή τους; Εάν ισχύει αυτό που είπε ο μεγάλος ποιητής του 20ου αιώνα, T. S. Eliot, στο δοκίμιό του «Παράδοση και Ατομικό Ταλέντο», τότε κάθε καλό νέο κείμενο αναπαράγει την κειμενική του κληρονομιά και κάθε προηγούμενο κομμάτι αυτής της κληρονομιάς ανανεώνεται και αναθεωρείται ως προς το καλύτερο από τη νέα αυτή προσθήκη. Τι όμως, θα έλεγαν κάποιοι Έλληνες μελετητές, μπορεί τάχα να προσφέρει ένας ακόμα Φιλοκτήτης σε έναν ολοκληρωμένο μύθο, τη στιγμή που, σύμφωνα με τη θεώρηση του Umberto Eco, ένας μύθος σφραγίζεται ως «μη αναλώσιμος» και η αίγλη του εδραιώνεται άπαξ και δια παντός από «κάποια μεγαλειώδη πράξη» (16); Αυτό που θέλω να εξετάσουμε απόψε είναι

αν αυτή η παγίωση του κλασικού μεγαλείου σημαίνει ότι πρέπει το κλασικό αυτό έργο να μπει στο μουσείο μιας πεπερασμένης, κλασικής θεώρησης, ή αν μπορούμε να ανακαλύψουμε νέες πτυχές που επαυξάνουν το μεγαλείο αυτό μέσα από τις σύγχρονες επανεγγραφές του, ή και δίνουν ίσως μία απάντηση διδακτική στα ερωτήματα που αφήνει ο ίδιος ο μύθος, όπως είδαμε παραπάνω, ανοιχτά. Για μια πιο άξια πρόκληση, επέλεξα προς εξέταση τρία ακραία παραδείγματα σχεδόν αμφισβήτησης και του κλασικού κειμένου και της περιρρέουσας επικής Ομηρικής ιδεολογίας που γέννησε το μύθο του Φιλοκτήτη. Τα τρία αυτά χαρακτηριστικά ακραία κείμενα μας διδάσκουν μία καλύτερη κατανόηση του πρωτότυπου, αποκαλύπτοντας αυτό που ο μέγας φιλόσοφος της αποδόμησης Jacques Derrida στο «Δομή, Σημείο και Παίγνιο» ονομάζει σημεία «έντασης» του κειμένου, δηλαδή σημεία όπου το κάθε κείμενο προσπαθεί να «κουκουλώσει» ανεπιτυχώς τις ιδεολογικές και σημειολογικές του αντιφάσεις. Σε κάθε μία από αυτές τις περιπτώσεις, η κριτική που ασκούν οι σύγχρονοι στον Σοφοκλή και στην επική ιδεολογία του πολεμιστή είναι σκληρή μεν, όμως αφενός καταφέρνει να βάλει το μυαλό να δουλεύει κριτικά, να μας πείσει ότι το κλασικό κείμενο είναι ζωντανό και δίπλα στα δικά μας προβλήματα. Αφετέρου δε λειτουργεί ως μία σμίλη που απομακρύνει την συσσώρευση πέτρας απολιθωμένης ευλαβικότητας και αποκαλύπτει λεπτομέρειες που ενυπάρχουν στο πρωτότυπο και που αποσιωπήθηκαν είτε με την πάροδο του χρόνου είτε επειδή σόκαραν τα ήθη κάποιας εποχής. Τα τρία αυτά θεατρικά είναι ο *Φιλοκτήτης* του Αντρέ Ζιντ, το *Πολύ Αργά για τον Φιλοκτήτη* του Αλφόνσο Σάστρε, και ο Φιλοκτήτης, ή Το Μαγεμένο Νησί του Τζον Τζέζουρουν.

Ο *Φιλοκτήτης* του Ζιντ, του υπαρξιστή Γάλλου θεατρικού συγγραφέα, ποιητή, κριτικού και Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας του 1947, εμφανίστηκε το Δεκέμβριο του 1898 στη λογοτεχνική επιθεώρηση *Revue blanche*, με υπότιτλο «Μία πραγματεία με τρία ηθικά διδάγματα». Να ήταν το δριμύ κρύο του Παρισινού χειμώνα που ενέπνευσε τον Ζιντ να τοποθετήσει τον ήρωά του σε μία αρκτική ερημιά, ένα κατάλευκο εκτυφλωτικό σκηνικό από χιόνι και πάγο, με το όνομα Νησί του Διαβόλου; Ίσως πάλι από το όνομα του νησιού που αντικαθιστά εδώ την αρχαία Λήμνο πρέπει να καταλάβουμε ότι η τρομαχτική παγωνιά είναι μάλλον αποτέλεσμα της ανθρώπινης απονιάς: το πραγματικό Νησί του Διαβόλου, στις ακτές της αποικίας της Γαλλικής Γουϊάνας, στη Νότιο Αμερική, υπήρξε διάσημος τόπος εκτοπισμού των αντιφρονούντων από το Γαλλικό καθεστώς, και ιδιαιτέρως του Λοχαγού Άλφρεντ Ντρέυφους, του αξιωματικού που μαρτύρησε εξόριστος ως θύμα της λεγόμενης «Υπόθεσης Ντρέυφους,» μίας πολιτικοστρατιωτικής πλεκτάνης που τον καταδίκασε για προδοσία και κατασκοπεία το 1894. Εξαιτίας του κουκουλώματος του πραγματικού ενόχου από τον Γαλλικό στρατό, ο Ντρέυφους υπέφερε τα πάνδεινα για να δικαιωθεί μόλις το 1906, με τιμητική επανένταξή του στο ενεργό Γαλλικό πυροβολικό και πολλές διακρίσεις. Τέσσερα χρόνια μετά την διαβόητη εξορία του αθώου Ντρέυφους, καθώς πιστοποιούν πολλοί κριτικοί όπως ο Ernst Robert Curtius, ο Louis Martin-Chauffier (προσωπικός φίλος του Ζιντ) και ο Alan Sheridan (*"Philoctète": Wikipédia*), ο Ζιντ εμπνέεται από την αδικία και μετατρέπει το Ντρέυφους σε Φιλοκτήτη, στρατιωτικό έντιμο αλλά ατιμασμένο και προδομένο από τους υποτιθέμενους συντρόφους του εξαιτίας της «αγιάτρευτης πληγής» που έφερε, δηλαδή του γεγονότος ότι ο Ντρέυφους ήταν Εβραίος σε μία Καθολική και αντισημιτική χώρα. Ακόμα και το γεγονός ότι το θεατρικό πρωτοδημοσιεύτηκε στη *Revue blanche* συνηγορεί υπέρ αυτής της ερμηνείας, καθώς το περιοδικό, υπό τη διεύθυνση του Γαλλοεβραίου διανοητή

ο κλασικό αυτό έργο να
μπορούμε να ανακαλύ-
τύγχρονες επανεγγραφές
ι αφήνει ο ίδιος ο μύθος,
λεξα προς εξέταση τρία
ιμένου και της περιρρέ-
κτήτη. Τα τρία αυτά χα-
νόηση του πρωτότυπου,
ques Derrida στο «Δομή,
δηλαδή σημεία όπου το
γικές και σημειολογικές
ου ασκούν οι σύγχρονοι
ληρή μεν, όμως αφενός
ότι το κλασικό κείμενο
λειτουργεί ως μία σμίλη
ότητας και αποκαλύπτει
ηκαν είτε με την πάροδο
ατά θεατρικά είναι ο *Φι-*
όνσο Σάστρε, και ο Φι-

ραφέα, ποιητή, κριτικού
ο 1898 στη λογοτεχνική
ι ηθικά διδάγματα». Να
ίντ να τοποθετήσει τον
νικό από χιόνι και πάγο,
ού που αντικαθιστά εδώ
νιά είναι μάλλον αποτέ-
στις ακτές της αποικίας
τος εκτοπισμού των αν-
ού Άλφρεντ Ντρέυφους,
νης «Υπόθεσης Ντρέυ-
για προδοσία και κατα-
νόχου από τον Γαλλικό
ις το 1906, με τιμητική
ρίσεις. Τέσσερα χρόνια
ύν πολλοί κριτικοί όπως
ος του Ζιντ) και ο Alan
δικία και μετατρέπει το
αι προδομένο από τους
που έφερε, δηλαδή του
ισημιτική χώρα. Ακόμα
lanche συνηγορεί υπέρ
Γαλλοεβραίου διανοητή

Léon Blum (*"Philoctète": Wikipédia*), είχε τοποθετηθεί μαχητικά υπέρ της αθωότητας του Ντρέυφους—όπως άλλωστε και πάμπολλοι διανοούμενοι. Το ότι το Νησί του Διαβόλου, τέλος, υπήρξε αποικία λεπρών προτού γίνει τόπος εξορίστων, κάτι σαν τη Σπιναλόγκα, υπογραμμίζει το γεγονός ότι μία πληγή γίνεται αγιάτρευτη όχι για ιατρικούς λόγους, αλλά επειδή το κοινωνικό σύνολο την ορίζει έτσι, λόγω μίας κάποιας ανάγκης για κοινωνική συσπείρωση μέσω της κατασκευής «εχθρών» (Τρώες, Εβραίοι, άρρωστοι—σήμερα τους λένε λαθρομετανάστες).

Εξ' αρχής λοιπόν ο Ζιντ τίθεται αντίθετα στο αρχαιοελληνικό ιδεώδες του πολεμιστή και της αρχής του κραταιότερου, προτάσσοντας έναν ηθικό κώδικα δικαιοσύνης και τιμής σε ατομικό και ανθρωπιστικό επίπεδο, άσχετα με ή ενάντια στην κοινωνική φήμη. Όπως υπογραμμίζει η Cornelia Hornosty στη διατριβή της, «Ατομικότητα: Η Κατάλυση του Παράδοξου στον Ζιντ»,

Το ότι η αυθεντική ανθρώπινη ύπαρξη έγκειται στον αυτόνομο εαυτό του ανθρώπου είναι μία ιδέα που εμποτίζει το έργο του Ζιντ. Στο Φιλοκτήτη ο κεντρικός χαρακτήρας είναι «ηθικός» πριν και πέρα από τους Έλληνες.... Είναι η δική του εσωτερική καλωσύνη και η προσωπικά ανεπτυγμένη του ηθική που του προσδίνουν χαρακτήρα και ουσία, όχι η Ελληνικότητά του. (18).

Η παραδοσιακή κατάληξη του μύθου, επομένως, καθίσταται προβληματική στο βαθμό που ο Φιλοκτήτης, τον οποίο η Hornosty αποκαλεί «το ωραιότερο παράδειγμα του ελεύθερου Ζιντιανού ατόμου που τελικά θριαμβεύει» (64), θα έπρεπε να προδώσει τον εαυτό του και την αρετή του για να τεθεί ξανά στην υπηρεσία των Ελλήνων στην Τροία. Ο Ζιντ παίρνει έναυσμα από την αρχική Σοφόκλεια στιχομυθία μεταξύ Οδυσσέα, που θέλει να κερδίσει τον Φιλοκτήτη ακόμα και με απάτη, και έντιμου Νεοπτόλεμου, και μεταφέρει αυτό το «σημείο έντασης» στο πεδίο του ανθρωπισμού που αντιτίθεται στην πολεμική αποθηρίωση: ο Οδυσσέας του Ζιντ αποκαλύπτει ότι παράτησαν τον Φιλοκτήτη στο νησί όχι γιατί τους τρόμαζαν οι κραυγές του, αλλά γιατί «μαλάκωναν με οίκτο τις ψυχές μας», κάτι που δεν είναι καλό για έναν στρατό κατακτητών (Ζιντ 93). Όσο για την τιμή του πολεμιστή, που ο Νεοπτόλεμος επικαλείται ότι διδάχτηκε από τον ηρωϊκό πατέρα του Αχιλλέα, ο Οδυσσέας απαντά δηκτικά «Ο πατέρας σου είναι νεκρός, Νεοπτόλεμε—εγώ είμαι ζωντανός» (Ζιντ 95).[2] Ο ίδιος ο Φιλοκτήτης, στα πρώτα λόγια που απευθύνει στον Οδυσσέα, του υπογραμμίζει πως «Ο άνθρωπος που ζει ανάμεσα στους άλλους είναι ανίκανος, ανίκανος, πίστεψέ με, για πράξεις αγνές και ανιδιοτελείς» (102): όπως εξηγεί ο κριτικός Vinio Rossi, «Εντελώς απομονωμένος, [ο Φιλοκτήτης] είναι απολύτως ελεύθερος να υπάρξει. Δεν είναι πια ένας Έλληνας αλλά απλά ένα ανθρώπινο πλάσμα, ελεύθερο να δημιουργήσει μία μη-ταυτότητα για τον εαυτό του» (149-50).

Αυτό λοιπόν που ο μύθος αποκαλεί αρρώστια, ο Ζιντ αποκαλύπτει με άλλο όνομα: αρετή–η οποία, στον κόσμο των κοινωνικών συμβάσεων και της υποκρισίας στο όνομα του έθνους, καθιστά τον ενάρετο άνθρωπο θύμα και αποσυνάγωγο. Ο Φιλοκτήτης-Ντρέιφους συναντά τον Φιλοκτήτη του μύθου ως μορφή σύμβολο του έντιμου πολεμιστή που έρχεται αντιμέτωπος με τη βρώμικη πλευρά του πολέμου, αλλά και της πολιτικής, μέσω της οποίας οι δειλοί στρέφουν τους γενναίους προς την κτηνωδία του πολέμου και την

[2] Οι μεταφράσεις από τα γαλλικά και τα ισπανικά είναι της γράφουσας.

απώλεια της ψυχής τους.

Έτσι ο Ζιντ κοντοστέκεται ειρωνικά απέναντι στο οξύμωρο της γιατρειάς, στο μύθο, μίας πληγής θεϊκής και αγιάτρευτης, καταδεικνύοντας πως ο Σοφοκλής ουσιαστικά μιλάει για λάθος πληγή: ο κλασικός Φιλοκτήτης δεν γιατρεύεται με το που φεύγει απ' το νησί του, αλλά ξανακολλάει την συλλογική αγιάτρευτη αρρώστια, το προπατορικό αμάρτημα της χαμένης αξιοπρέπειας του ανθρώπου ως ζώου πολιτικού—αυτό που ο άλλος μεγάλος αμφισβητίας των γαλλικών γραμμάτων, ο Αλμπέρ Καμύ, ονόμασε «η Πανούκλα». Αυτό που, σε μία πρόσφατη συνέντευξή του, ο καθηγητής Ιατρικής Κοινωνιολογίας του Χάρβαρντ Νικόλας Χρηστάκης επίσης περιγράφει με όρους «Φιλοκτητικούς» όταν παρομοιάζει τα ανθρώπινα κοινωνικά δίκτυα μετάδοσης συναισθημάτων ως ιούς: «Πράγματι, όπως και ο ιός, έτσι και εδώ κολλάει ο ένας από τον άλλο. Όσο πιο απομονωμένος είναι κάποιος, τόσο λιγότερο επηρεάζεται. Μόνο αν είσαι μόνος στο κρύο, στην κορυφή ενός βουνού, δεν θα επηρεατείς από τη δύναμη των κοινωνικών δικτύων» (Λυγερού 28). Η παρατήρηση αυτή μας κάνει να αναλογιστούμε ακόμα και το πολικό σκηνικό της Νήσου του Διαβόλου ως ένα σημείο «απολύτου μηδέν», όπου η κινητικότητα των ανθρώπινων αλληλεπιδράσεων παγώνει και η ψυχή μένει αμόλυντη. Η αμφισβήτηση της Σοφόκλειας «γιατρειάς», τέλος, εντείνεται ακόμα περισσότερο αν αναλογιστούμε αυτό που είπε ο ψυχολόγος Καρλ Γκούσταβ Γιουνγκ για το ότι δοκιμασίες όπως αυτή του Φιλοκτήτη, ιδιαίτερα αν περιλαμβάνουν το σύμβολο της σπηλιάς, συνιστούν μία τελετουργική διαδικασία που είναι «σύμβολο υπέρβασης προς ένα ανώτερο ή ωριμότερο στάδιο εξέλιξης» (146), και επομένως θα ήταν τουλάχιστο ήττα να μιλάμε για επιστροφή.

Η λύση που επιλέγει ο Ζιντ για αυτό το φαινομενικά ασυμβίβαστο δίλημμα του Φιλοκτήτη, γιατρειά και κοινωνική ένταξη ή τιμή κι ελευθερία, μοιάζει να αφήνει έκθετο ηθικά τον Σοφοκλή, με το ξαφνικό τέλος καλό, όλα καλά της δικής του τραγωδίας—ή μάλλον, σύμφωνα με το «σημείο έντασης» που αυτό το χάπι εντ κουκουλώνει. Σύμφωνα με τον Austin (203), στον τελικό μονόλογο του Σοφόκλειου Φιλοκτήτη, όπου αποχαιρετεί λυρικά το νησί του, δείχνοντας ευγνωμοσύνη και αγάπη για το επί 10 χρόνια κολαστήριο, αλλά και σπίτι του, χτυπάει περίεργα η φράση όπου ζητάει από το προσωποποιημένο νησί να τον κατευοδώσει στο δρόμο του και να τον αφήσει να φύγει «άμεμπτος» (στίχος 1465). Αναρωτιέται λοιπόν ο/η κριτικός—και μαζί του ο/η θεατής—για ποια άραγε μομφή θα πρέπει να ζητάει ο Φιλοκτήτης συγχώρεση, και ο Austin καταλήγει στο συμπέρασμα ότι ζητάει να του συγχωρεθεί το ότι «εγκαταλείπει τον εαυτό που είχε επιλέξει να γίνει στη Λήμνο», για την «μεγάλη προδοσία του εαυτού στον οποίον έχει επενδύσει την τιμή και τη δίκαιη στάση του» (Austin 204). Διαβάζοντας με οξυδέρκεια τα όσα κρύβονται ανάμεσα στις γραμμές του αρχαίου δράματος, λοιπόν, ο Ζιντ πρέπει να αποφύγει να κάνει τον ήρωά του, που άλλοι αποκάλεσαν προδότη, αληθινό προδότη του εαυτού του. Ενώ λοιπόν στο Ζιντ ο Οδυσσέας έχει κανονίσει με τον Νεοπτόλεμο να ποτίσουν τον Φιλοκτήτη υπνωτικό και να του πάρουν το τόξο, ο Νεοπτόλεμος, που τελικά ομολογεί στον Φιλοκτήτη ότι «αχ, είμαι άρρωστος» από το «μικρόβιο» της αρετής που έχει ενσταλάξει ο Φιλοκτήτης στα φυλλοκάρδια του (Ζιντ 112-13), του αποκαλύπτει την απάτη και τάσσεται με το μέρος του. Όμως αυτός ο Φιλοκτήτης, σε αντίθεση με τον αρχαιοελληνικό μύθο που προτάσσει την κοινωνική καταξίωση του «κλέους» και της φήμης, ξέρει ότι η σύνταξη με άλλους, έστω και με αγαθές προθέσεις, ζημιώνει την ελευθερία. Επιλέγει λοιπόν να πιεί οικειοθελώς και μπρο-

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γράφει τη θανα
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Ζιντ περιγράφε
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ρουν...—Είμα

Με αυτόν
κνυόμενος τρα
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γιατρέψει επιτέ

Ακόμα πιο
των Ισπανικών
μένει πολυγρα
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ενάντια στη δι
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τους μεταμορφ
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από τάχα μου
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και πιο πρόσφα
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την ψευδαίσθη
λόγια, ο Φιλοκ
δακρύσουμε—

στά τους το υπνωτικό, απαλλάσοντας τον νεαρό Νεοπτόλεμο από μια ρήξη με τη βουλή των Ελλήνων, και αφήνει να του πάρουν το τόξο και να φύγουν, ξέροντας ότι έτσι υπογράφει τη θανατική του καταδίκη. Η πέμπτη και τελική πράξη του έργου αποτελείται μόνο από δύο γραμμές που λέει ο Φιλοκτήτης, έρημος πια ξανά, κάτω από έναν ουρανό που ο Ζιντ περιγράφει ως «τέλεια καθαρό», με τον ήλιο ν' ανατέλλει ολόλαμπρος ως ένα σύμβολο όχι θανάτου, αλλά ανάστασης: «Δεν θα ξαναγυρίσουν πια—δεν έχει άλλο τόξο να μου πάρουν...—Είμαι ευτυχισμένος» (128).

Με αυτόν τον τρόπο ο Ζιντ από τη μια μοιάζει να διορθώνει τον Σοφοκλή, αποδεικνυόμενος τραγικότερος του μεγάλου τραγικού, ο οποίος επέλεξε να θυσιάσει στην ορθότητα της μυθικής ιστορίας την οργανικότητα της πλοκής του αλλά και την ηθική που υποστηρίζει αλλού—π.χ., στον *Οιδίποδα επί Κολωνώ*, το τελευταίο δράμα του, γραμμένο αμέσως μετά τον *Φιλοκτήτη* (ως μία τελειοποιημένη εκδοχή και απολογία ίσως;). Από την άλλη όμως, τι άλλο κάνει από το να είναι ο πιο καλός ο μαθητής του τραγικού του δασκάλου: η δική του εκδοχή απελευθερώνει τα αποσιωπημένα «γιατί» του κλασικού κειμένου που καλύπτονται άτσαλα από τον πειθαναγκασμό ενός από μηχανής Ηρακλή, ανάγοντας τον Φιλοκτήτη σε αυτό που θα έπρεπε να είναι, ένα σύμβολο του «σύγχρονου αγώνα των ανθρώπων να διατηρήσουν μία ενεργό πνευματική, συνειδησιακή ακεραιότητα και έναν αλώβητο ανθρωπισμό και μία ασυμβίβαστη ιδεολογία», όπως λέει ο σκηνοθέτης του κλασικού έργου το 2004 στην Επίδαυρο, Γιάννης Ιορδανίδης (Γραμμέλη 31). Έτσι ο Ζιντ αφήνει, ίσως, την υποβόσκουσα φωνή του ενεντηντάχρονου και εξαντλημένου Σοφοκλή ως μέγα δραματουργού της ψυχολογίας των ηρώων του να μιλήσει, έστω και στα γαλλικά, και να γιατρέψει επιτέλους την δική του, καλλιτεχνική πληγή.

Ακόμα πιο επιθετικός από τον Ζιντ αποδεικνύεται ο Αλφόνσο Σάστρε, μεγάλη μορφή των Ισπανικών γραμμάτων της Γενιάς του 1955 που, παρά τα σχεδόν 90 του χρόνια παραμένει πολυγραφότατος, με 50 θεατρικά, δοκίμια, κριτικές κινηματογράφου και κείμενα πρόζας. Αλάθητο τόξο ο Σάστρε θεωρεί το θέατρο, που το χρησιμοποίησε όλη του τη ζωή ενάντια στη δικτατορία του Φράνκο και σε κάθε μορφή ολοκληρωτισμού ή κοινωνικής αδικίας, στρατευμένος στης τάξεις της Ισπανικής αριστεράς και του βασκικού απελευθερωτικού κινήματος. Κι ένα από τα πιο ενδιαφέροντα βέλη στη φαρέτρα του Σάστρε είναι η τάση του να παίρνει ήρωες από το παρελθόν ή από άλλα λογοτεχνικά κείμενα και να τους μεταμορφώνει εκ βαθέων, σε μία διαδικασία απομυθοποίησης που αφενός τους απαλλάσει από το να θεωρούνται οχήματα παρωχημένων ιδεολογιών, αφετέρου τους δίνει βαθύτερη ανθρωπιστική διάσταση, αντιστρέφοντας την συνήθη υφαρπαγή τέτοιων ειδώλων από τάχα μου πατριδολάγνες δικτατορίες και αρτηριοσκληρωτικά ιδεολογήματα. Έτσι, όπως μας λέει ο κριτικός Mariano de Paco, «ο Φίλο ο Χοντρός, πρωταγωνιστής του *Πολύ Αργά για τον Φιλοκτήτη* (1989), είναι μία μορφή εξαθλιωμένη που έρχεται αντιμέτωπη με μία αδύνατη πραγματικότητα», ενώ το έργο ανήκει, κατά τον Farris Anderson, στην τρίτη και πιο πρόσφατη δραματουργική περίοδο του συγγραφέα, την επική, όπου «ο Σάστρε, σαν τον Μπρεχτ, χρησιμοποιεί διάφορες τεχνικές αποστασιοποίησης ή αποξένωσης: δραματικά τεχνάσματα σχεδιασμένα να ελαχιστοποιούν την συμπάθεια των θεατών καταστρέφοντας την ψευδαίσθηση μίας οργανικής, νατουραλιστικής πραγματικότητας» (840). Με άλλα λόγια, ο Φιλοκτήτης του Σάστρε δεν θέλει να αγγίξει την καρδιά ή το θυμικό μας για να δακρύσουμε—αλλά το μυαλό μας, για να μας κάνει να στοχαστούμε και να δράσουμε.

Ο Φίλο ο Χοντρός, λοιπόν, είναι ένας αντιστασιακός ποιητής που η δικτατορία του Φράνκο τον έχει εξορίσει σε ένα βασκικό νησί, όπου εκείνος, ανίκανος να επικοινωνήσει με τους κλειστούς και άγριους κατοίκους και με μια φριχτή όζουσα πληγή στο πόδι από τα βασανιστήρια που πέρασε στα κρατητήρια, ζει τις μέρες του μπεκροπίνοντας μέχρι αναισθησίας στην τοπική ταβέρνα. Ο Φίλο περιγράφεται από τον Σάστρε να έχει ξεπέσει σε συνθήκες έσχατης αθλιότητας, με αποφορά «σάπιου ψαριού» (Σάστρε 41), προδομένος από τους παλιούς του συντρόφους, ένας από τους οποίους είναι τώρα πανούργος Υπουργός Πολιτισμού. Όμως να που μια φήμη ότι ο Φίλο, ή Χοσέ Λαρρέα, αριστερός ακτιβιστής και συγγραφέας, θα είναι ο επόμενος νικητής του Βραβείου Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας, αναγκάζει το καθεστώς να τον αποκαταστήσει άρον-άρον, ώστε να δείξουν καλό πρόσωπο στο εξωτερικό! Για το σκοπό αυτό ένα συνεργείο τεσσάρων ατόμων πηγαίνει με την προσφορά αποκατάστασης σε χρήμα και δόξα στο νησί της εξορίας του Φίλο, στη Νούλη, το όνομα του οποίου αποτελεί συνδυασμό της μυθικής Υπερβόρειας νήσου Θούλης και του «νο», του Ισπανικού όχι, που δηλώνει κάτι ακόμα πιο απόμακρο και γεωπολιτισμικά ανύπαρκτο, την άκρη του πουθενά. Τα μέλη του συνεργείου αποτελούν εκφάνσεις του Σοφόκλειου καστ, με το γιατρό/ψυχίατρο Καρράσκο, που τον φωνάζουν και «Καλιγκάρι», να μοιράζεται με τον Υπουργό το ρόλο του δολοπλόκου Οδυσσέα, τα μέλη του τηλεοπτικού συνεργείου Λίνο και Χουανίτα να κάνουν τον Χορό, και τη νοσοκόμα Πάκα, την επονομαζόμενη και «Ερυθρό Σταυρό» λόγω της συμπονετικής της νοοτροπίας και των κομμουνιστικών της τάσεων, να παίζει το ρόλο του Νεοπτόλεμου.

Όταν όμως ο Φίλο, που κάτω απ' το αποτρόπαιο παρουσιαστικό του κρύβει οξύτατο, βαθιά καλλιεργημένο πνεύμα και λόγο, και καρδιά ανυπότακτου έντιμου αγωνιστή, απορρίψει με περιφρόνηση τις ψεύτικες τιμές του καθεστώτος, τότε το συνεργείο τον απαγάγει δια της βίας ναρκωμένο και τον οδηγεί στη Μαδρίτη, όπου βιώνει την πραγματική εξορία και κόλαση. Με τη βοήθεια ενός εγκεφαλικού εμφυτεύματος που έχει εφεύρει ο γιατρός Καρράσκο, και με τους πάντες γύρω του να υποκρίνονται τους ρόλους τους, ο Φίλο, με γιατρεμένο πλήρως το πόδι, οδηγείται να πιστέψει ότι όλο αυτόν τον καιρό ζούσε στην πατρίδα του ως Χοσέ Λαρρέα, απολαμβάνοντας μεγάλες τιμές και πλούτη από το καθεστώς, και πως όλες αυτές οι μνήμες της εξορίας του ήταν παραισθήσεις, αποτέλεσμα πρόσφατου αυτοκινητιστικού ατυχήματος! Η πληγή του Χοσέ Λαρρέα μετατοπίζεται από το πόδι στο κεφάλι, εφόσον εκεί παίζεται η πραγματική μάχη του ελέγχου του ανθρώπινου όντος από τον ολοκληρωτισμό, και είναι μία μάχη που ο από μηχανής ψευτοθεός δόκτωρ Καλιγκάρι (όνομα που βεβαίως ο Σάστρε δανείζεται από τον τρομαχτικό ψυχίατρο στο διάσημο θρίλερ του Μουρνάου) θα χάσει: η δύναμη της ψυχής και του μυαλού του Λαρρέα θα υπερισχύσει, και, με τη βοήθεια της «Ερυθρού Σταυρού», θα θυμηθεί την αλήθεια. Στρεφόμενος με οργή και περιφρόνηση ενάντια στους δολοπλόκους απαγωγείς του, πνίγει με τα ίδια του τα χέρια τον άθλιο Υπουργό, και το καθεστώς δεν έχει άλλη λύση πια από το κουκούλωμα της ιστορίας: ξανανοίγουν την φριχτή πληγή του Λαρρέα και τον μεταφέρουν ναρκωμένο πίσω στη Νούλη, παρά το ξέσπασμα της Πάκα που καταλαβαίνει πια ότι «η Ισπανία είναι η κόλαση» (Σάστρε 117). Το τέλος της ιστορίας είναι πραγματικά Μπρεχτικό, με δύο εκδοχές: στη μία, ο Φίλο, πιο πληγωμένος από ποτέ αλλά πάντα αξιοπρεπής, φεύγει από την ταβέρνα, και μετά από μία φανταστική στιχομυθία με τον Οδυσσέα του Σοφοκλή, αυτοκτονεί. Στην άλλη, ο γιατρός επεμβαίνει και μας λέει ότι δεν ξέρουμε τι απέγινε ο Λαρρέα στη Νούλη,

στασιακός ποιητής που η δικτατορία το
όπου εκείνος, ανίκανος να επικοινωνήσ
μια φριχτή όζουσα πληγή στο πόδι από τ
ις μέρες του μπεκροπίνοντας μέχρι ανα
εται από τον Σάστρε να έχει ξεπέσει σ
πιου ψαριού» (Σάστρε 41), προδομένο
οποίους είναι τώρα πανούργος Υπουργό
Χοσέ Λαρρέα, αριστερός ακτιβιστής κα
ιβείου Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας, αναγκάζε
στε να δείξουν καλό πρόσωπο στο εξω
ων ατόμων πηγαίνει με την προσφορά
ξορίας του Φίλο, στη Νούλη, το όνομα
βόρειας νήσου Θούλης και του «νο»,
ιακρο και γεωπολιτισμικά ανύπαρκτο,
τοτελούν εκφάνσεις του Σοφόκλειου
άζουν και «Καλιγκάρι», να μοιράζεται
τα μέλη του τηλεοπτικού συνεργείου
ακόμα Πάκα, την επονομαζόμενη και
οπίας και των κομμουνιστικών της

ταρουσιαστικό του κρύβει οξύτατο,
πότακτου έντιμου αγωνιστή, απορ-
ος, τότε το συνεργείο τον απαγάγει
που βιώνει την πραγματική εξορία
όματος που έχει εφεύρει ο γιατρός
ται τους ρόλους τους, ο Φίλο, με
ο αυτόν τον καιρό ζούσε στην πα-
μές και πλούτη από το καθεστώς,
σθήσεις, αποτέλεσμα πρόσφατου
ία μετατοπίζεται από το πόδι στο
γχου του ανθρώπινου όντος από
ής ψευτοθεός δόκτωρ Καλιγκάρι
κό ψυχίατρο στο διάσημο θρίλερ
ιού του Λαρρέα θα υπερισχύσει,
αλήθεια. Στρεφόμενος με οργή
υ, πνίγει με τα ίδια του τα χέρια
ι από το κουκούλωμα της ιστο-
αφέρουν ναρκωμένο πίσω στη
τι «η Ισπανία είναι η κόλαση»
ρεχτικό, με δύο εκδοχές: στη
τής, φεύγει από την ταβέρνα,
ο Σοφοκλή, αυτοκτονεί. Στην
πέγινε ο Λαρρέα στη Νούλη,

ν και Νόμπελ τελικά δεν πήρε, ενώ μας λέει και για το τέλος όλων των άλλων χαρακτήρων
του έργου, που επιβεβαιώνει ότι όσοι γοητεύτηκαν από την ωμή δύναμη του καθεστώτος
καταλήγουν εκμαυλισμένοι και κατεστραμμένοι από αυτό. Το διπλό αυτό τέλος μπορεί να
λειτουργεί αντι-θεατρικά, δηλαδή να μας αποκαλύπτει ότι αυτό που βλέπουμε είναι μία
μυθοπλασία, όμως ο δημοσιογραφικού τύπου κατάλογος των επιζώντων έναντι του λογο-
τεχνικά αυτοκτονούντος Φίλο ανάγει τον δεύτερο στη σφαίρα του μύθου, ενώ η αμφιβολία
για το αν ζει ή αν πέθανε τον καθιστά ένα είδος φαντάσματος, όπως το μισοτελειωμένο
ποίημά του, αιώνια πιθανά υπαρκτό και ικανό να στοιχειώνει τα όνειρα των δημοκρατικών
μας συνειδήσεων σε κάθε ανάγνωση.

Όπως και ο Ζιντ, ο Σάστρε, αν και φαίνεται να φλερτάρει ο ίδιος με το ρόλο του Φιλο-
κτήτη, όπως ομολογεί στις σημειώσεις του έργου (Σάστρε 130), αφιερώνει το έργο στον
José Bergamín Gutiérrez [Χοσέ Μπεργαμίν Γουτιέρρεθ] (Σάστρε 131), μεγάλο Ισπανό συγ-
γραφέα και θεατρικό για τον οποίο «επίσης ήταν πολύ αργά». Έπειτα από μακρόχρονη εξο-
ρία λόγω της αριστερής του δράσης και αντίστασής του στο καθεστώς του Φράνκο, ο
Μπεργαμίν γύρισε στην Ισπανία μόνο και μόνο για να προδωθεί από το κατεστημένο και
να τελειώσει τη ζωή του αποσυνάγωγος στη Χώρα των Βάσκων. Όμως, αντίθετα από τον
Ζιντ, το έργο του Σάστρε βρίθει αναφορών στο Σοφοκλή και σε άλλα σχετικά έργα της λο-
γοτεχνίας: το μισοτελειωμένο ποίημα για το οποίο ο Λαρρέα χρίζεται υποψήφιος νομπελί-
στας ονομάζεται «Φιλοκτήτης», η Πάκα με το Γιατρό λίγο προτού εμφανιστεί ο Φίλο,
διαβάζουν, παίζοντας τους αντίστοιχους ρόλους, τη Σοφόκλεια στιχομυθία έντιμου Νεο-
πτόλεμου-οππορτουνίστα Οδυσσέα (Σάστρε 39-40), και το αποκορύφωμα βέβαια είναι η
τελική σκηνή πριν την αυτοκτονία, όπου ο Λαρρέα κυριολεκτικά μπαίνει στο μύθο. Η επι-
χείρηση ανάκτησης του Λαρρέα από την Νούλη όμως επίσης ονομάζεται από τη χούντα
«Επιχείρηση Φιλοκτήτης», ως ένα άθλιο καπέλωμα του έργου του αλλά και του κλασικού
παρελθόντος (κάτι που ίσως θυμίζει έντονα τακτικές ενός άλλου κόμματος-συμμορίας να-
ζιστών που ίσως έχουμε υπόψη στην Ελλάδα…). Αλλά αν και ο ίδιος ο Σάστρε ομολογεί
με ταπεινοφροσύνη στον επίλογο του έργου ότι «Οι Έλληνες για μια ακόμα φορά μας θυ-
μίζουν τη ματαιότητα πολλών δικών μας δήθεν καινοτομιών» (Σάστρε 129), η σχέση του
με τον Σοφοκλή κάθε άλλο παρά αρμονική είναι: όχι μόνο ανατρέπει πολλά από τα Σοφό-
κλεια και μυθολογικά δεδομένα, στερώντας από τους Αχαιούς το όπλο τους, αλλά επίσης,
όπως ομολογεί ο Λαρρέα στον Υπουργό, «Πάντοτε ένιωθα μίσος για τον Οδυσσέα, μ'
ακούς; Κι Οδυσσέας είσαι εσύ. Η πονηριά του Κράτους…» (Σάστρε 107)—και ολοκλη-
ρώνει αυτόν τον «συλλογισμό περί αισθητικής» (Σάστρε 107), όπως τον ονομάζει, καρυ-
δώνοντάς τον. Η αντιπολεμική στάση του Σάστρε ξεπερνά την απλή παθητική αντίσταση
και αναχώρηση από τα εγκόσμια που πρεσβεύει ο Ζιντ και περνά στην ενεργό αντεπίθεση
και το σαμποτάζ του καθεστώτος. Επικεντρωνόμενος στη δόλια πολιτική που κινεί κρυφά
τα νήματα του πολέμου, αντιμετωπίζει την πληγή στη γενεσιουργό αιτία της, όχι στη θε-
ραπεία απλά των συμπτωμάτων της. Ο Σάστρε δηλώνει ότι ακόμα και ενάντια σε δυνάμεις
που ξεπερνούν το ανθρώπινο—είτε αυτές λέγονται Ηρακλής, είτε ψυχοτροπική τεχνολογία
και πανίσχυρο Κράτος—η ψυχή και το πνεύμα του ανθρώπου μπορούν να αντισταθούν
και να στερήσουν από τους δυνάστες του τη μοναδική τους πραγματική δύναμη: την υπο-
ταγή και την ένοχη συνεργασία. Μια τέτοια στάση, που ο μεγάλος φιλόσοφος της αντί-
στασης ενάντια σε κάθε ολοκληρωτισμό, ο Theodor Adorno, την ονόμασε «αρνητική

διαλεκτική», δεν μπορεί να αφήσει αλώβητα και τα όπλα του ψυχολογικού ελέγχου που χρησιμοποιούν τέτοια καθεστώτα ενάντια στους πολίτες τους, ακόμα κι αν αυτά είναι τα ιερά και τα όσια του πολιτισμικού παρελθόντος που οι χούντες επικαλούνται. Πρέπει κι αυτά να αποκαθαρθούν από το μιαρό άγγιγμα του «Πατρίς Θρησκεία Οικογένεια» (έννοιες καλές με αισχρή χρήση, όπως ο Λαρρέα με το μικροτσίπ να ελέγχει το μυαλό του στην υπηρεσία του Φράνκο). Η κομβικότερη σκηνή του έργου, ο διάλογος μεταξύ της φιλόλογου και μέλους του συνεργείου Χουανίτα και του Λαρρέα όταν αυτός μυρίζεται πια την αλήθεια, αφορά άλλωστε σε αυτό ακριβώς το πρόβλημα. Όταν η Χουανίτα του λέει ότι εξαιτίας του «Φιλοκτήτη» του το καθεστώς τον κανακεύει, για να ολοκληρώσει το ποίημα, ο Λαρρέα, που ήθελε το ποίημά του ως αντίσταση στον Φρανκισμό, αναφωνεί «Αι, Φιλοκτήτη, πόσο σ' αγαπώ και πόσο σε έχω μισήσει εδώ και καιρό και για πάντα». Και όταν η Χουανίτα του διαβάζει από τον Σοφοκλή την ικεσία του Φιλοκτήτη προς τον Νεοπτόλεμο να τον πάρει μαζί του, ο Λαρρέα ξεσπά:

Το ποίημά μου θα ήτανε μία ριπή πολυβόλου ενάντια σε αυτό το αίσχος... Συμβιβασμός με όλα αυτά τα σκατά... επανένταξη... «Πέτα με στο καράβι σου σαν να ήμουν μπόγος!» Αυτό ποτέ, ποτέ... κι ο Ηρακλής, deus ex machina... καλλιτεχνική αθλιότητα, υπαρξιακός τρόμος—και μ' αυτό το σκεπτικό έγραφα εγώ ποιος ξέρει πόσο καιρό το φουκαριάρικό μου το ποίημα, «Πολύ Αργά για τον Φιλοκτήτη»... ένα μανιφέστο ενάντια στο Σοφοκλή, ενάντια στην άκαρδη ηθική δολοφονία του Φιλοκτήτη, ο οποίος δεν μπορεί να επιστρέψει σε μια τέτοια πρότερη αθλιότητα. Η ο Φιλοκτήτης είναι επαναστατημένος με αυτόν τον τρόπο ή δεν είναι τίποτα του τίποτα του τίποτα! Άκου εκεί σκοτώνει τον Πάρη! Που να ψοφήσει ο Πάρης από κακή κλανιά στον κώλο! Ο Φιλοκτήτης πρέπει να πεθάνει στο Νησί της Μοναξιάς και να θαφτεί με τα όπλα του... μη ανακτημένα! Με πιάνεις;

Χουανίτα: Ναι, ναι κύριε. Σας καταγράφουμε στο μαγνητόφωνο. (Σάστρε 91)

Ο Λαρρέα συνεχίζει το ξέσπασμά του στολίζοντας τον Νεοπτόλεμο ως «Γραφειοκράτη στην υπηρεσία του Οδυσσέα, πράκτορα, κάθαρμα» (Σάστρε 91) και τελειώνει με ένα μανιφέστο ανυποταγής: «Εγώ δεν θα ήθελα να αποκοιμηθώ... Εγώ...θα ήθελα να πεθάνω πάνω σε ένα πελώριο ξέρασμα οργής ενάντια στον Οδυσσέα, ενάντια στο Κράτος, ενάντια στο Θεό»—κι όσο για το Νόμπελ, «Αν μου δώσουν το Βραβείο Νόμπελ, εγώ θα πάω να χέσω, με τον δέοντα σεβασμό, τη μάνα του Βασιλιά της Σουηδίας και όλο του το σόι» (Σάστρε 92).

Η σκληρή και βρώμικη γλώσσα του κατά τα άλλα τόσο εκλεπτυσμένου διανοητικά Λαρρέα είναι εσκεμμένη. Το δίλημμα που ενορχηστρώνει ο Σάστρε είναι μία σωματική, βιολογική εξαθλίωση—το βασανιστήριο, η εξορία, η βρισιά—έναντι της χειρότερης, τελικά, ηθικής εξαθλίωσης, και το αποτέλεσμα, αν και ενάντια στον Σοφοκλή, είναι, πρώτον, όπως στόχευε και η αρχαία τραγωδία, βαθύτατα ηθικό, δεύτερον, είναι εξαιρετικά Σοφόκλειο. Όπως υπογραμμίζει ο Austin, ο Σοφοκλής έπρεπε να παλέψει με το υλικό της δικής του παράστασης, «και να εγγράψει εαυτόν μέσα στην παράδοση και να γράψει ενάντια στην παράδοση» (Σάστρε 15) για να αναδείξει τα βαθύτερα «σημεία έντασης» του μύθου. Αλλά και ο Σάστρε αναμετριέται με τον μύθο που έπλασε ο Σοφοκλής, τη δική του Ευρωπαϊκή παράδοση, κάνοντας την ίδια εργασία αποκάθαρσης. Εξ' ου και η γοητεία του έργου που αναδύεται μέσα από τον αποτρόπαιο πρωταγωνιστή του, όπως άλλωστε λέει και ο συγγραφέας και κριτικός Javier Villán:

χολογικού ελέγχου που
όμα κι αν αυτά είναι τα
πικαλούνται. Πρέπει κι
ία Οικογένεια» (έννοιες
'χει το μυαλό του στην
ς μεταξύ της φιλόλογου
μυρίζεται πια την αλή-
ίτα του λέει ότι εξαιτίας
ώσει το ποίημα, ο Λαρ-
φωνεί «Άι, Φιλοκτήτη,
». Και όταν η Χουανίτα
ον Νεοπτόλεμο να τον

αίσχος... Συμβιβασμός
σαν να ήμουν μπόγος!»
αθλιότητα, υπαρξιακός
ταιρό το φουκαριάρικό
ενάντια στο Σοφοκλή,
ν μπορεί να επιστρέψει
κτημένος με αυτόν τον
ινει τον Πάρη! Που να
ει να πεθάνει στο Νησί
: πιάνεις;
ο. (Σάστρε 91)
εμο ως «Γραφειοκράτη
αι τελειώνει με ένα μα-
..θα ήθελα να πεθάνω
ια στο Κράτος, ενάντια
όμπελ, εγώ θα πάω να
αι όλο του το σόι» (Σά-

ττυσμένου διανοητικά
ος είναι μία σωματική,
ντι της χειρότερης, τε-
οφοκλή, είναι, πρώτον,
είναι εξαιρετικά Σοφό-
ι με το υλικό της δικής
και να γράψει ενάντια
α έντασης» του μύθου.
ής, τη δική του Ευρω-
αι η γοητεία του έργου
λλωστε λέει και ο συγ-

Το *«Πολύ Αργά για τον Φιλοκτήτη»* είναι μία ακόμα από τις σαστριανές εμμονές μου. Ο ήρωας, γκροτέσκος και με πληγές μολυσμένες, η ανάγκη της αναμόρφωσής του ως σημαιοφόρου και απολογητή μιας πολιτικής ανδρείκελων, όλα αυτά και πολλά περισσότερα λαμβάνουν χώρα σε αυτή την σπαραχτική, λαβυρινθώδη, τέλεια τραγωδία.... Ένα βιτριολικό ηθικό πορτρέτο, δοσμένο με ασκητικό, τραγικό χιούμορ, της «επανένταξης» ή μεταστροφής ή όπως θέλει κανείς να ονομάσει τελοσπάντων μια τέτοια επιχείρηση λήθης προς όφελος της εξουσίας. Ο Φιλοκτήτης, μία παράβαση της κλασικής τραγωδίας, ως θεμέλιος λίθος του ύστατου, ή πρωθύστατου, Αλφόνσο Σάστρε.

Αν ο Σάστρε πρέπει να παλέψει, όπως γίνεται αντιληπτό, ενάντια και στην προσπάθεια αναγωγής και του ίδιου σε λογοτεχνικό κειμήλιο της Ισπανίας, τέτοιο πρόβλημα δεν έχει ο τρίτος και πιο σύγχρονος της αποψινής μας παρέας: ο Αμερικανός Τζον Τζέζουρουν. Γιος Πορτορικάνων μεταναστών, δηλωμένος γκέι ακτιβιστής και μεταμοντέρνος θεατρικός συγγραφέας και σκηνοθέτης, κυρίως για το φημισμένο θέατρο La Mama, ο Τζέζουρουν διακρίνεται για τις εικονοκλαστικές καινοτομίες του, όπως το *Ο Τσανγκ σ' Ένα Αδειασμένο Φεγγάρι*, ένα θεατρικό που παίχτηκε επί σειρά ετών στο Πύραμιντ Κλαμπ της Νέας Υόρκης σε ...συνέχειες, μέσα από επεισόδια αυτοσχεδιασμού, ενώ έχει κερδίσει σειρά βραβείων και υποτροφιών για τα έργα του που εξερευνούν, με τον ένα ή τον άλλο τρόπο, τις ταυτότητες του περιθωρίου. Ή μάλλον, τις μη-ταυτότητες, καθώς οι περιθωριακές υπάρξεις, οι μειονότητες, αφενός είναι για τους υπόλοιπους «αόρατοι άνθρωποι», αφετέρου όταν ταυτοποιούνται, η ταυτότητα είναι αυτή που τους επιβάλει συνήθως με το ζόρι η επικρατούσα τάξη, και με όρους σαφώς μειονεκτικούς. Είναι αναμενόμενο λοιπόν ο συγγραφέας, γιος στρατιωτικού γιατρού μάλιστα (Osborn 74), να ταυτίζεται και λιγάκι με τον Φιλοκτήτη, τον «βρωμερό» αποσυνάγωγο για το στρατό των Αχαιών, τον ήρωα για τους θεατές του Σοφοκλή. Το γεγονός μάλιστα ότι ο Τζέζουρουν έγραψε το έργο το 1994 κατά παραγγελία για τον σπουδαίο ηθοποιό του Wooster Group, Ron Vawter, ο οποίος του σύστησε ουσιαστικά το Σοφόκλειο κείμενο αλλά πέθανε από AIDS προτού προλάβει να πρωταγωνιστήσει στο έργο, θα οδηγούσε αμέσως σε μία λογική ταύτιση της αγιάτρευτης και αποκρουστικής πληγής του Φιλοκτήτη με το AIDS, με όλο το στίγμα και την φυσική και κοινωνική απομόνωση που αυτό επιφέρει.

Όμως, όπως λέει ο ίδιος ο Τζέζουρουν, ο Vawter «είπε ότι με προσέγγισε γιατί δεν ήθελε ένα γκέι θεατρικό, ούτε ένα θεατρικό για το Έιτζ, ούτε ένα θεατρικό με χλαμύδες, και ούτε ήθελε ένα θεατρικό για τον εαυτό του» ("Author's Note"). Κι όντως, αυτό που τελικά γράφει ο Τζέζουρουν, ένα θεατρικό σαν θραύσματα εφιάλτη, με ποιητική γλώσσα και γεμάτο ανατροπές, ένα έργο που η κριτικός Alisa Solomon αποκάλεσε «πετράδι με κοφτερά δόντια», είναι πολύ περισσότερο. Στρατηγικά σπαρμένες αναφορές στην «Ινδοκαμίνα» (Τζέζουρουν 74), σε έναν «γκρεμισμένο μιναρέ» (Τζέζουρουν 80) και στην αφόρητη ζέστη και υγρασία στο δωμάτιο του φτηνού τροπικού ξενοδοχείου όπου μένει αυτός ο Φιλοκτήτης οδήγησαν πολλούς κριτικούς να μιλήσουν για ένα έργο καταγγελία των αποικιοκρατικών πολέμων, και, στο ανέβασμα του 2007, να το συνδέσουν σαφώς με την τότε Αμερικανική εισβολή στο Ιράκ (Solomon, Propst). Ο αντιπολεμικός χαρακτήρας του έργου, που ανέδειξαν ο Ζιντ και ο Σάστρε, διατηρείται έτσι και στον Τζέζουρουν, μπολιασμένος με μία «κουήρ» (λοξή και γκέι δηλαδή) οπτική: ο Φιλοκτήτης του μιλάει για «σωρούς» από «όμορφα αγόρια σε φέρετρα που ουρλιάζουν θλίψη» (Τζέζουρουν 76), ενώ ο κριτικός Andy

Propst, ερμηνεύοντας το λογοπαίγνιο που γίνεται στο έργο (Τζέζουρουν 77) με την φράση «Μη ρωτάς, μη μιλήσεις»—την φράση που, μέχρι πρόσφατα, συνόψιζε την πολιτική του Αμερικανικού στρατού για τους στρατευμένους ομοφυλόφυλους—σημειώνει ότι «Ο Φιλοκτήτης καταφέρνει να καταγγείλει τον τρόπο που ο στρατός τον ΗΠΑ συμπεριφέρεται σε γκέι και λεσβίες στρατιωτικούς» ("Review").

Όμως το σημαντικότερο στοιχείο του έργου, και σημείο έντασης όπου ο Τζέζουρουν έρχεται αντιμέτωπος με τον Σοφοκλή, είναι το διακύβευμα της ταυτότητας που αναφέραμε παραπάνω. Ο κριτικός Σάββας Πατσαλίδης το θεωρεί μάλιστα θεμέλια και μορφο-ποιητική λίθο του έργου, αλλά και κύρια δίοδο έκφρασης της μεταμοντέρνας νοοτροπίας του, καθώς «έρχεται αντιμέτωπο με, και επαναδιαπραγματεύεται την έννοια της ενότητας του παρελθόντος με την ελπίδα ότι θα μπορέσει να προχωρήσει μπροστά» (72). Η φύση του μύθου, όπως είδαμε πως είπε ο Umberto Eco, είναι να παγιώνει την ταυτότητα ενός πράγματος και να το καθιστά ομοιογενές, αδιαπραγμάτευτο και απαράλλαχτο, ιερό και όσιο. Έτσι, όμως, υπάρχει ο κίνδυνος να το αποκόψει από το «τα πάντα ρει» της αληθινής ζωής και αναπόφευκτα να το νεκρώσει. Αντιμετωπίζοντας αυτό το πρόβλημα, ο μεταμοντερνισμός προτείνει μία παιγνιώδη, παρωδιακή προσέγγιση της παράδοσης, γεμάτη εσκεμμένους αναχρονισμούς, όπου η ταυτότητα του κάθε πράγματος συνεχώς (πρέπει να) επαναδιαπραγματεύεται, γιατί ο μόνος μύθος τελικά που υπάρχει και μας δυσκολεύει τη ζωή είναι αυτός που λέει ότι η ταυτότητά μας είναι ομοιογενής και σταθερή. Όλοι μας φτιαχνόμαστε και ξαναφτιαχνόμαστε κάθε στιγμή από την παλίρροια και την άμπωτη των κοινωνικών μας τριβών, οπότε ίσως απλά θα πρέπει να το παραδεχτούμε λειτουργώντας ανάλογα. Ελεύθερη να ορίσει τον εαυτό της, η ανθρώπινη ιδιαιτερότητα βρίσκει την ευτυχία, έστω και σε ένα έρημο νησί—ενώ αντίθετα, περιχαρακωμένη από κοινωνικές δοξασίες και πατροπαράδοτα πρέπει, είτε στριμώχνεται, όπως ο Φιλοκτήτης του Σοφοκλή, για να τις εξυπηρετήσει, είτε καταστρέφεται ως μιαρή.

Με αυτό ακριβώς το σκεπτικό, ο Φιλοκτήτης του Τζέζουρουν είναι ένα παιχνίδι ρόλων και προσωπείων, που όχι μόνο αλλάζουν με ταχυδακτυλουργική ταχύτητα, αλλά αφήνουν τους πρωταγωνιστές κυριολεκτικά κομμάτια στην ψυχή και στο σώμα—το έργο βρίθει αναφορών σε σκόρπια όργανα και κατακερματισμένες συνειδήσεις. Ο Οδυσσέας και ο βοηθός του Νεοπτόλεμος αποβιβάζονται σε κάποιο ανώνυμο χαοτικό τοπίο να βρουν τον Φιλοκτήτη, μόνο που όταν αυτός εμφανίζεται, ισχυρίζεται ότι είναι…πεθαμένος (Τζέζουρουν 71), ένα σκανταλιάρικο, αφάνταστα πληγωμένο φάντασμα που δεν έχει καμία όρεξη να πειθαρχήσει σε ρεαλπολιτίκ επιχειρήματα. Στη συνέχεια μεταμορφώνεται στη θεά του Νησιού και μητέρα της θεάς Χρύσης, ένα είδος αρχετυπικής Κυβέλης, της μητέρας-δημιουργού του σύμπαντος (72), εφόσον για το Φιλοκτήτη η αποδοχή της θηλυκής πλευράς είναι ένας τρόπος να συμβιβαστεί με την πληγή:

«Μια μέρα, λίγο αφότου είχα ξεμπαρκάρει εδώ, ένα πουλάκι ήρθε κοντά μου.
[…]
Το πουλάκι είπε:
«Εμείς τα πλάσματα του νησιού, αποφασίσαμε ένα μέλλον για σένα. Μια οδό διαφυγής.
Θα ήθελες να ματώνεις χωρίς πόνο;
Να πίνεις γάλα αντί για βαλτόνερο;
Βλέπουμε πως οι κινήσεις των πλανητών διαταράσσουν τις παλίρροιες του αίματος στο

πόδι σου.
Μια γυναίκ
Ποιο άλλο
Κανένα.
Μια γυναίκ
Και να φτιά
Μια γυναίκ
Μια γυναίκ
Σε βλέπω ν
Σύρε με το
Πιστεύω πι
«Εγώ;» είπ
Δεν νομίζα
Μερικές βέ
Στη συνέχε
στο Θεό, που τ
τεινό απ' το σι
ζουρουν 75).
αυτό-αποδοχή
ανθρώπινου π
μενη «θεά» μι
ριέχει φριχτή
γεγονός ότι αυ
δεν το έχει πιό
Ευλογημένου'
χαμπαράτα, τα
ένα είδος Ινδο
του όπως είναι
στα πλάσματα
πολεμιστή πο
τιμή του.
Και ποιος ε
του, αν όχι μι
όταν λέει στον
[τις βρισιές] α
περιφρόνηση
«Γιατί εσύ είσ
διάρκεια του έ
την κοινωνική
φορετικότητα
τους ανικανοπ
και το έργο βρ
όχι, όπως το «

πόδι σου.
Μια γυναίκα κρατά το φεγγάρι μέσα στο σώμα της.
Ποιο άλλο ζώο έχει κύκλο 28 ημερών;
Κανένα.
Μια γυναίκα μπορεί να κρατήσει ζωή στο σώμα της,
Και να φτιάξει απ' ατήν όχι μόνο γυναίκες μα και άντρες.
Μια γυναίκα μπορεί να ματώνει ανώδυνα.
Μια γυναίκα μπορεί να βγάλει γάλα.
Σε βλέπω ν' αλλάζεις μέσα απ' το μαρτύριό σου.
Σύρε με το μαχαίρι σου στην τούνδρα, και φύτεψε.
Πιστεύω πως σύντομα πρόκειται να γίνεις γυναίκα.»
«Εγώ;» είπα, «Δεν κατάλαβα καλά, χρυσή μου;
Δεν νομίζω».
Μερικές βδομάδες αργότερα, μου ήρθε η περίοδος. (Τζέζουρουν 74-75).

Στη συνέχεια ο Φιλοκτήτης επιδίδεται σε μία δοξαστική προσευχή στον εαυτό του και στο Θεό, που του λέει ότι τον έφτιαξε έτσι όπως είναι, «πιο χαμηλά απ' τον πάτο,/ πιο σκοτεινό απ' το σκότος,/ πιο μαύρο απ' τη μαυρίλα,/ σε έκανα έτσι για να με δοξάζεις» (Τζέζουρουν 75). Το φαινομενικό αυτό παράδοξο παραλήρημα είναι ουσιαστικά η ομολογία αυτό-αποδοχής του Φιλοκτήτη, και του κάθε διαφορετικού και περιθωριακού όντος, ως ανθρώπινου πλάσματος και παιδιού του ίδιου Θεού. Ο Φιλοκτήτης ως αυτογονιμοποιούμενη «θεά» μπορεί έτσι με το λόγο να ξαναγεννήσει μια ταυτότητα που μπορεί να εμπεριέχει φριχτή οδύνη, όμως είναι κάτι πραγματικά δικό του και μπορεί να το αγαπήσει. Το γεγονός ότι αυτό το δισέλιδο σχεδόν δοξαστικό άσμα φέρει πολλές ομοιότητες, αν και αυτό δεν το έχει πιάσει κανένας κριτικός ως τώρα, με την *Μπαγκαβάντ Γκίτα*, το "Τραγούδι του Ευλογημένου" από το Ινδικό έπος *Μαχαμπαράτα*, επιτείνει διπλά την αξία του. Στη *Μαχαμπαράτα*, το τραγούδι του θεού Κρίσνα θυμίζει στον υπέρτατο πολεμιστή Αρτζούνα—ένα είδος Ινδού Αχιλλέα, και επίσης τοξότη—ότι καθήκον του είναι να αποδεχτεί τον εαυτό του όπως είναι. Έτσι και η κατά Τζέζουρουν γκίτα αφενός τοποθετεί το Φιλοκτήτη ανάμεσα στα πλάσματα του Θεού, καλώς καμωμένα όπως κι αν είναι, αφετέρου τον εξαγνίζει ως πολεμιστή που σύρθηκε και πληγώθηκε σε έναν ανόσιο πόλεμο, δίνοντάς του πίσω την τιμή του.

Και ποιος είναι τότε που αφαίρεσε τότε από αυτόν τον Φιλοκτήτη την τιμή και την υγεία του, αν όχι μια θυμωμένη θεότητα; Την απάντηση τη δίνει ο Φιλοκτήτης αμέσως μετά, όταν λέει στον Οδυσσέα, που τον περιλούζει με τις χειρότερες βρισιές «Όχι μόνο τις πήρα [τις βρισιές] σου κατάκαρδα, έγιναν η καρδιά μου, να στέλνει μία ακρωτηριαστική αυτοπεριφρόνηση μέσα σε κάθε φλέβα του μυαλού μου» (Τζέζουρουν 78). Και καταλήγει: «Γιατί εσύ είσαι το φίδι που με δάγκωσε και μ' έστειλε εδώ» (Τζέζουρουν 78). Καθόλη τη διάρκεια του έργου Οδυσσέας και Νεοπτόλεμος δεν σταματούν να εκφράζουν καταιγιστικά την κοινωνική κατακραυγή, την περιφρόνηση, την στοχοποίηση και ενοχοποίηση της διαφορετικότητας του Φιλοκτήτη, που όμως σιγά-σιγά αποδεικνύεται ότι εκφράζει το δικό τους ανικανοποίητο, τη δική τους κακοφορμισμένη από τις σφαγές αυτοεκτίμηση. Γι' αυτό και το έργο βρίθει από εμβόλιμες αναφορές σε φαγητά και ποτά, άλλα συμβατικά κι άλλα όχι, όπως το «σάντουιτς με αίμα και μέλι» του Οδυσσέα (Τζέζουρουν 76) ή ο Φιλοκτήτης

ως «σάπια μελιτζάνα κοκκινιστή με σκόρδο» (Τζέζουρουν 74): η αδηφάγα κοινωνία καταβροχθίζει τους ανθρώπους και τους φτύνει ως υπολείμματα αληθινών εαυτών, ενώ κατασκευάζει αποδιοπομπαίους τράγους για να εδραιώνει την πίστη της στη δική της «καλή» και «φυσιολογική» ταυτότητα (Τζέζουρουν 77):

ΟΔΥΣΣΕΑΣ: Πού τη βρίσκεις τόση διαστροφή;

ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗ: Όταν βλέπω το είδωλό μου στα μάτια σου.

ΟΔΥΣΣΕΑΣ: Πραγματικά αυτό βλέπεις;

ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗΣ: Ω ναι. Καημενούλι μου, σε τι φριχτό κόσμο πρέπει να ζεις.

ΟΔΥΣΣΕΑΣ: Κι εσύ μέσα του ζεις.

ΦΙΛΟΚΤΗΤΗΣ: Δεν ζω μέσα του, ζω από κάτω του. Άντε βγάλε άκρη. Για φαντάσου. (Τζέζουρουν 79)

Η ένταση κορυφώνεται με τη σκηνή ανάκρισης του Φιλοκτήτη, όπου όταν ο Οδυσσέας τον πιέζει:

Θέλω να μου πεις απ την αρχή ως το τέλος για ν' ακούσουμε τι έκανες

Και έφερες αυτή την κατάρα στα κεφάλια μας.

Τι προδοσία τέλεσες;

Ποια στροφή πήρε η ποια διαστροφή σου; (Τζέζουρουν 85)

ο Φιλοκτήτης ομολογεί πως στο βωμό της θεάς δεν πήγε να κάνει θυσία, αλλά για να βρει «λίγη υγρασία, τη γλύκα του νυχτερινού αέρα», δηλαδή ένα εν κρυπτώ ομοφυλοφυλικό ραντεβού (Τζέζουρουν 87). Αρνείται όμως πια να αποδεχτεί την οποιαδήποτε ενοχή γι' αυτό, να το δεί ως κακή πράξη, κι ας τον πιέζουν οι ανακριτές του (Τζέζουρουν 87). Ο Φιλοκτήτης έχει πια συμφιλιωθεί με την πληγή του, που του την επέβαλε αυτή ακριβώς η κοινωνία που αποφασίζει υποκριτικά ποιος είναι ένοχος και ποιος αθώος, νορμάλ ή μη. Και ο λόγος που ο Φιλοκτήτης αναδεικνύεται αθώος βρίσκεται στη φράση που επαναλαμβάνεται σαν παράδοξο ρεφραίν σε όλη τη διάρκεια της ανάκρισης: «Έχει καμία σχέση με την αγάπη;» Αυτό που η κοινωνία ονόμασε μίασμα για τον Φιλοκτήτη ήταν μία αναζήτηση αγάπης, και μάλιστα, όπως αποκαλύπτεται καθώς ο Οδυσσέας αρχίζει να λυγίζει και να ματώνει και ο ίδιος, αφορούσε στον ίδιο τον Οδυσσέα, που ήταν στο παρελθόν ο κρυφός εραστής του και τον πρόδωσε για να ανεβεί στην στρατιωτική ιεραρχία (Τζέζουρουν 87). Λίγο πριν από το τέλος του έργου, σε μία αντιστροφή των ρόλων, είναι πια ο Οδυσσέας που εκλιπαρεί τον Φιλοκτήτη «Βύθισε τη βελόνα [της ηρωίνης] και γλίτωσε τη λογική μου απ' τη μιζέρια της» (Τζέζουρουν 88), ενώ ο Νεοπτόλεμος ζητά και παίρνει ένα φιλί αποχαιρετισμού, παρόλο που ο Φιλοκτήτης τον προειδοποιεί: «Αυτός που πιεί απ' το στόμα μου θα γίνει όπως κι εγώ» (Τζέζουρουν). Ο θάνατος του Φιλοκτήτη, που έρχεται στο τέλος, είναι ανάλογα ένας θάνατος λύτρωση, αρμονικός, στην αγκαλιά του μετανιωμένου Νεοπτόλεμου, στον οποίο αφήνει την προφητεία του: «Ο Άδης είναι παντοτινά άδειος αλλά οι πορτοκαλιές ανθίζουν ακόμα κάτω απ' τον κάτω κόσμο» (Τζέζουρουν 90). Στην τελευταία, «μεταθανάτια» σκηνή του έργου, ο Φιλοκτήτης, φάντασμα πια και αιώνιο κείμενο, απολαμβάνει τη νέα του ελευθερία ως «Κανένας»--το όνομα με το οποίο ο Οδυσσέας ξεγέλασε και τύφλωσε τον Κύκλωπα, που το ένα του μάτι και η αφιλόξενη βαρβαρότητά του συμβολίζουν ακριβώς αυτό τον δογματισμό και την προκατάληψη απέναντι στον διαφορετικό, στον περιθωριακό ικέτη (Τζέζουρουν 91).

Η προσέγγιση του Τζέζουρουν σαφώς θα κάνει ορισμένους συντηρητικούς κλασικιστές

να διαρρήξουν τα ιμάτιά τους λέγοντας πως το παρατράβηξε ο Τζέζουρουν και καμία σχέση δεν έχει ο Σοφοκλής με γκέι, τραβεστί, κτλ. Κι όμως, εδώ φτάνουμε στην ουσία του σοφόκλειου προβλήματος της οργανικά «χαλαρής» αυτής τραγωδίας του, που έχει γεννήσει τόση απορία ανάμεσα στους κλασικιστές, ώστε για παράδειγμα ο Joe Park Poe να διαβάζει τον *Φιλοκτήτη* στη μελέτη του ως μια ανατρεπτική κριτική των θεών—από τον ευσεβέστατο Σοφοκλή (27-32)! Γιατί, μα γιατί, να υποφέρει ο Φιλοκτήτης δέκα χρόνια;

Αυτό που δεν μπορούσε να απαντήσει ο Σοφοκλής επί σκηνής είναι αυτό που αποτελεί την πεμπτουσία της παράδοξης φιγούρας του Φιλοκτήτη, και που μπορεί να ειδωθεί μόνο αν εξετάσουμε προσεκτικά τον θεμέλιο μύθο πάνω στον οποίο ο Αθηναίος ποιητής βάσισε την τραγωδία του. Και χαρακτηριστικό του μύθου είναι ότι ενυπάρχει μόνο στις αλληλοσυνδέσεις του, κι όχι σε κάθε ιστορία του αυτόνομα: η εικόνα και το νόημα ενός Οιδίποδα, μιας Περσεφόνης, ενός Οδυσσέα, μίας Ελένης, ενός Ηρακλή, δεν εμπεριέχονται σε μία μόνο αφήγηση, αλλά στις παραλογές και παραφυάδες ενός δικτύου ιστοριών για το χαρακτήρα αυτό. Συνθέτοντας λοιπόν τις συνιστώσες του Φιλοκτήτη θα δούμε ότι, πρώτον, η ειδικότητά του ως πολεμιστή, αυτή του τοξότη, εθεωρείτο πάντοτε από τους αρχαίους ως υποδεέστερη σε ανδρεία από αυτή του οπλίτη, καθώς οι οπλίτες συγκρούονταν σώμα με σώμα, ενώ οι τοξότες σκότωναν από ασφαλή απόσταση. Γι' αυτό κι ο Πάρης, τον οποίο σκοτώνει ο Φιλοκτήτης τελικά, ορίζεται ως ο μέγας δειλός της *Ιλιάδας*. Καθώς δε το τόξο συνδέθηκε με τις Αμαζόνες και τους θηλυπρεπείς, κατά τους Έλληνες, Σκύθες, η χρήση του συνεπάγεται την κατά κάποιο βαθμό εκθήλυνση του τοξότη. Πόσο μάλλον αν αυτό το τόξο ο Φιλοκτήτης το απέκτησε από μια πράξη συναισθηματισμού και συμπόνοιας που τον διαφοροποίησε από όλους τους παριστάμενους άντρες-συντρόφους του Ηρακλή, το άναμμα δηλαδή της πυράς που θα λύτρωνε τον ημίθεο ήρωα από το μαρτύριο του δηλητηριασμένου χιτώνα του. Ο Ηρακλής μάλιστα, όπως τον αναδεικνύει η σπουδαία κλασσικίστρια Nicole Loraux, φαίνεται να είναι ο κατ' εξοχήν ήρωας που συνδέεται με τη θηλυκότητα—παράδοξο μεν, αλλά ο μύθος λειτουργεί μέσα από τη μυστηριακή σύζευξη των παραδόξων δε. Ενώ η Ήρα, η κατεξοχήν θεά-γυναίκα, είναι η μεγάλη εχθρός του, αυτός παίρνει το όνομα «Ήρας κλέος,» «η Δόξα της Ήρας», η δε Ήρα είναι αυτή που τον «γεννάει» συμβολικά όταν αυτός πεθαίνει και πάει στον Όλυμπο να γίνει θεός. Ο Ηρακλής, επιπλέον, υπήρξε και ολίγον παρενδυτικός, αν θυμηθούμε το επεισόδιο με την Ομφάλη. Όπως το υπέρμετρο μαρτύριο του Φιλοκτήτη συνδέεται με την μυστικιστική σοφία που αποκτά στη Λήμνο, έτσι και η υπεραρρενωπότητα του Ηρακλή, που τον στρέφει ενάντια στις Αμαζόνες της Ιππολύτης, φαίνεται να ξεδίνει, ή να βρίσκει το δικό της «σημείο έντασης», μέσα από βουτιές στη θηλυκότητα. Το τέλος του μάλιστα, με ακούσια υπαίτιο τη γυναίκα του Δηάνειρα—όνομα Αμαζόνας, παρεμπιπτόντως—περνάει μέσα από μία διαδικασία δραματικής εκθήλυνσης: «Κοιτάξτε με, που κείτομαι στενάζοντας και κλαίγοντας σαν άβγαλτο κορίτσι!» αναφωνεί ο γιος του Δία στις *Τραχίνιες*—του Σοφοκλή (στίχοι 1070-72)! Η γυναικεία επιρροή του μαγικού τόξου είναι, καταπώς φαίνεται με πολλούς τρόπους, κληρονομικό χάρισμα.

Και μια που ανέφερα δύο φορές τις Αμαζόνες, το ακροατήριο του Σοφοκλή σίγουρα θα γνώριζε ότι η Λήμνος ήταν μυθολογικά ένα νησί Αμαζόνων. Όπως αναφέρει μεταξύ άλλων η Carola Greengard, «η Λήμνος παραδοσιακά συνδεόταν και με την λατρεία της Κυβέλης»—της θεάς στην οποία μεταμορφώνει τον Φιλοκτήτη του ο Τζέζουρουν—«και με μύ-

θους που επικεντρώνονται στην θανάσιμη σύγκρουση μεταξύ ανδρών και γυναικών ή στην αποκλειστική κατοχή του νησιού από γυναίκες» (47). Ένας γνωστός μύθος της Λήμνου, όπως τον αφηγείται ο Ψευδο-Απολλόδωρος (I.114), μας λέει ότι κάποτε η Αφροδίτη τιμώρησε τις γυναίκες της Λήμνου, επειδή δεν θυσίαζαν σε αυτήν, να όζουν μία φριχτή μυρωδιά. Είτε γι' αυτό το λόγο, είτε επειδή οι άντρες του νησιού προτιμούσαν να κοιμούνται με Θρακιώτισσες σκλάβες, οι παραμελημένες γυναίκες, οργισμένες, αποφάσισαν να σφάξουν κάθε αρσενικό του νησιού στον ύπνο τους και να ιδρύσουν Αμαζονοκρατία. Τη φριχτή αυτή μυρωδιά, την οποία οι παλαιότεροι πολιτισμοί γενικότερα τη συνδέουν ειδικά με τη μυρωδιά της γυναίκας κατά την έμμηνο ρύση, όταν το γυναικείο σώμα, σε αντίθεση με το αντρικό, ματώνει χωρίς να πεθαίνει, και η οποία μυρωδιά, ως εκ θαύματος, στοιχειώνει τον Φιλοκτήτη στη Λήμνο, όπου κατοικεί έρημος σε μία χαρακτηριστική σπηλιά «με δύο ανοίγματα», μπρος και πίσω. Ο Μαρτιάλης στα *Επιγράμματά* του (2.84) αναφέρει μάλιστα ξεκάθαρα ότι ο Φιλοκτήτης ήταν «εκθηλυσμένος» (παθητικός) ομοφυλόφυλος, ενώ ο σχολιαστής του παραθέτει επίσης την εκδοχή άλλης πηγής (*Σχόλια στον Θουκυδίδη* 1.12.2) ότι, επιπλέον (ή αντί) των πόλεων που ίδρυσε στην κάτω Ιταλία επειδή ναυάγησε εκεί επιστρέφοντας από την Τροία, ο Φιλοκτήτης μετά το θάνατο του Πάρη, προσεβλήθηκε από τη «γυναικεία ασθένεια» και, ντροπιασμένος, αυτοεξορίστηκε και ίδρυσε και μία άλλη πόλη, την ονομαζόμενη, λόγω του χαρακτήρα του ιδρυτή της...Μαλακία (δηλαδή «τρυφηλότητα») (Williams 256).

Καθίσταται λοιπόν προφανές, όταν συγκεντρώσει κανείς τα στοιχεία του μύθου, ότι ο Φιλοκτήτης εξορίζεται νωρίς «γιατί υπονομεύει το ηθικό του στρατεύματος» όχι με τον πόνο του, αλλά με τη διαφορετικότητά του. Ένας άντρας που επιδίδεται σε ανεγξέλεκτες κραυγές και γίνεται τόσο φανερά έρμαιο του πόνου του, ένας άντρας με ανεξήγητη πληγή στο πόδι—το οποίο στο μύθο συχνότατα παραπέμπει στο ενδιάμεσο των ποδιών όργανο, εξ' ου και ο Οιδίπους—δεν αποτελεί καλό παράδειγμα σε ένα εκστρατευτικό σώμα γεμάτο από...άντρες. Χωρίς τις γυναίκες τους. Για πολύ καιρό. Με άλλα λόγια, ο Φιλοκτήτης του Τζέζουρουν απλά τολμάει να πει με το όνομά τους όσα ο Σοφοκλής έπρεπε, για λόγους κοσμιότητας, να αποσιωπήσει στο μύθο, έστω κι αν αυτό δημιουργούσε μια περίεργη αίσθηση στη δική του τραγωδία. Η αποκάλυψη της θηλυκής πλευράς του πολεμιστή δεν αποτελεί επομένως ιεροσυλία, αλλά μάλλον μια πιο ειλικρινή συνομιλία με το μύθο, χωρίς προσωπεία. Όπως λέει κι ο Φιλοκτήτης του Τζέζουρουν στον Οδυσσέα, «Πρέπει να δεις κάτι. Βγάλε τη μάσκα σου» (Τζέζουρουν 81).

Πρέπει λοιπόν κι εμείς τελικά να δούμε ότι ο μύθος ήταν αυτός που πρώτα προκάλεσε αυτούς τους τρεις συγγραφείς να τον γλυτώσουν από την αγιογραφία του, να του βγάλουν τη μάσκα την φαγωμένη, όπως είπε κι ο Σεφέρης, από τα πολλά μαλάματα που τη φορτώσαμε. Το κλασικό άλλωστε πάντα προκαλεί τον αναγνώστη να ασχοληθεί μαζί του και να του δώσει νέα ζωή. Οι αξίες του μύθου πρέπει να αναμετριώνται με τις νέες αξίες, γιατί μία ιδεολογία που είναι πια επιβλαβής δεν αξίζει να συντηρείται μόνο και μόνο επειδή είναι παραδοσιακή. Το γεγονός εδώ ότι αυτοί οι συγγραφείς χρησιμοποίησαν τον ίδιο το μύθο του Φιλοκτήτη ως εργαλείο για να κρίνουν κάποιες κλασικές αρχές μας λέει ότι το υλικό της αμφισβήτισης ενυπήρχε μέσα στα δομικά υλικά του μύθου, όπως άλλωστε κάθε κείμενο εμπεριέχει την αποδόμησή του και κάθε ζωντανό σώμα εμπεριέχει το θάνατό του. Ταυτόχρονα ο μύθος κάνει το νέο αυτό κείμενο κομμάτι της αίγλης του και δορυφόρο της κλα-

σικότητάς του.
χτής» ή έλλειψι
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Θεοδωρόπουλο

ών και γυναικών ή στην
:ός μύθος της Λήμνου,
ποτε η Αφροδίτη τιμώ-
υν μία φριχτή μυρωδιά.
να κοιμούνται με Θρα-
σισαν να σφάξουν κάθε
:ία. Τη φριχτή αυτή μυ-
ν ειδικά με τη μυρωδιά
:ντίθεση με το αντρικό,
στοιχειώνει τον Φιλο-
σπηλιά «με δύο ανοίγ-
84) αναφέρει μάλιστα
φυλόφυλος, ενώ ο σχο-
τον *Θουκυδίδη* 1.12.2)
:ιδή ναυάγησε εκεί επι-
ρη, προσεβλήθηκε από
ι ίδρυσε και μία άλλη
[αλακία (δηλαδή «τρυ-

οιχεία του μύθου, ότι ο
ατεύματος» όχι με τον
ίδεται σε ανεγξέλεκτες
ας με ανεξήγητη πληγή
ο των ποδιών όργανο,
ατευτικό σώμα γεμάτο
όγια, ο Φιλοκτήτης του
έπρεπε, για λόγους κο-
ε μια περίεργη αίσθηση
:ολεμιστή δεν αποτελεί
το μύθο, χωρίς προσω-
, «Πρέπει να δεις κάτι.

που πρώτα προκάλεσε
ία του, να του βγάλουν
λάματα που τη φορτώ-
ξοληθεί μαζί του και να
με τις νέες αξίες, γιατί
ο και μόνο επειδή είναι
ίησαν τον ίδιο το μύθο
ς μας λέει ότι το υλικό
; άλλωστε κάθε κείμενο
το θάνατό του. Ταυτό-
και δορυφόρο της κλα-

σικότητάς του. Κι αν όντως υπάρχουν προσφυγές στο μύθο που είναι περίπτωση «αρπαχτής» ή έλλειψης ταλέντου, δεν χρειάζεται ν' ανησυχούμε. Η ιστορία της λογοτεχνίας μας διδάσκει πως αυτές οι προσπάθειες απλά δεν έχουν αντίκτυπο, καθώς αφανίζονται από την ίδια τους την ασημαντότητα (όπως ο Φιλοκτήτης-Σάτυρος στον επιεικώς απαράδεκτο *Ηρακλή* της Ντίσνεϋ). Με άλλα λόγια, ότι είναι φτιαγμένο από καλή στόφα αντέχει, ακόμα κι αν μπει στα «Λευκά πολύ λερωμένα».

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