

Συναγωνίζεσθαι
Studies in Honour of Guido Avezzù

Edited by Silvia Bigliuzzi, Francesco Lupi,
Gherardo Ugolini



Skenè Studies I • 1

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The Second *Kommos* in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1081-1217)*

SETH L. SCHEIN

Abstract

The second *kommos* in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1081-217) marks the point in the play when the fortunes of Philoctetes are at their nadir: he has been betrayed by Neoptolemus on the orders of Odysseus, and he must come to terms with his imminent abandonment, without his bow, to starve to death on Lemnos. The *kommos* is notable for the failure of Philoctetes and the Chorus to communicate: in strophe and antistrophe α and β (1081-168), Philoctetes sings forth his emotional pain and despair, apostrophizing his cave and the birds and beasts of the island and lamenting his imminent demise, while the Chorus defend themselves, Neoptolemus, and Odysseus from responsibility and place the blame on Philoctetes himself for his sufferings. In the astroptic lyric dialogue that follows (1169-217), Philoctetes rejects the Chorus' repeated urging to accompany them to Troy, and in the end retreats into his cave, using language typically associated with helplessness and death. This is the first of several false endings in the play that conflict with the traditional mythology associated with Philoctetes and the end of the Trojan War. It would have challenged Sophocles' audience, as it still challenges audiences and readers, to understand what it would mean if the play were really to stop at this point

The second *kommos* in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1081-217) comes at the point in the play when the fortunes of Philoctetes are at their nadir, when he must face the twin realities that he has been betrayed by his new friend, Neoptolemus, at the command of his hated enemy, Odysseus, and that he will once again be abandoned on Lemnos, this time without his life-sustaining bow.¹ Neoptolemus has refused

* I offer this essay to Guido Avezzi in admiration of his outstanding scholarship, from which I have learned so much, and with gratitude for his personal kindness.

¹ I refer to the 'second *kommos*', because many editors and commentators consider the exchange between Neoptolemus and the Chorus at 827-64 to be

to speak to Philoctetes for over 150 lines, even when directly addressed; he has expressed his solidarity with Odysseus, as they depart for the ship, by using the dual number (νῶ μὲν οὖν ὁρμώμεθον, “Let’s go, then, the two of us”, 1079), which earlier in the play he had used of himself and Philoctetes (νῶιν, 779). He has permitted the Chorus to stay with Philoctetes for as long as it takes to prepare the ship for sailing, but unlike Philoctetes, who wishes the Chorus to remain so they may acknowledge his abandonment and take pity on him (κοῦκ ἐποικτιρεῖτέ με, 1071), which would mean, at the least, joining with him in lamentation,² Neoptolemos hopes they will bring Philoctetes to his senses, so that “in this (period of time) this man might perhaps acquire some way of thinking / more agreeable to us” (χοῦτος τάχ’ ἄν φρόνησιν ἐν τούτῳ λάβοι / λῶω τιν’ ἡμῖν, 1078-9) and accompany them willingly to Troy.

The present paper offers a literary interpretation of the second *kommos*. For convenience I reproduce the Greek text in Schein 2013, and a significantly revised version of the translation in Schein 2003.³

Φι. ὦ κοίλας πέτρας γύαλον

στρ. α

the play’s first *kommos*. This exchange however, consists of a metrical triad sung by the Chorus, with four hexameters (839-42) chanted by Neoptolemos between the antistrophe and the epode. These hexameters conform to the norms of Homeric epic and should be understood as spoken verse; they lack the unusual metrical and stylistic features of, for example, Herakles’ hexameters in *Soph. Tr.* 1010-14 and 1031-40, which are located within, rather than between, strophe and antistrophe and should be thought of as lyric verse, in contrast to *Tr.* 1018-22, the ‘epic’ hexameters chanted by the Old Man and Hyllus between the strophe and antistrophe. Therefore *Phil.* 827-64 probably should not be thought of as a *kommos*, in which, by definition, both chorus and character(s) sing, and *Phil.* 1081-217 should be called simply ‘the *kommos*’ rather than ‘the second *kommos*’ of the play.

2 κοῦκ ἐποικτιρεῖτέ με (1071), like other words related to οἶκτος, οἰκτίζω, οἰκτίρω etc., need not imply that some action should follow from the emotion, in contrast to ἐλεέω, ἔλεος, and ἐλεεῖνω and their cognates, e.g. ἐλεουσι (308), ἐλέησον (501). See Prauscello 2010: 200-3, who cites Burkert 1955: 42-3 and Pohlenz 1956: 52.

3 Schein 2013 includes a brief critical apparatus; our honorand’s edition of the play in Avezzù *et al.*: 2003 gives more detailed information about the readings and affiliations of relevant mss. and scholarly conjectures and emendations.

- θερμὸν καὶ παγετῶδες, ὥς
 σ' οὐκ ἔμελλον ἄρ', ὦ τάλας,
 λείψειν οὐδέποτ', ἀλλὰ μοι
 καὶ θνήσκοντι συνείσημι. 1085
- ὦμοι μοί μοι.
 ὦ πληρέστατον αὔλιον
 λύπας τᾶς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τάλαν,
 τίπτ' αὐ μοι τὸ κατ' ἦμαρ ἔσται;
 τοῦ ποτε τεύξομαι 1090
- σιτονόμου μέλεος πόθεν ἐλπίδος;
 ἴθ' αἰ πρόσθ' ἄνω
 πτωκάδες ὄξυτόνου διὰ πνεύματος·
 ἄλωσιν οὐκέτ' ἴσχω.
- Χο. σύ τοι, σύ τοι κατηξίω- 1095
 σας, ὦ βαρύποτμε, κοῦκ
 ἄλλοθεν ἂ τύχα ἄδ' ἀπὸ μείζονος,
 εὐτέ γε παρὸν φρονῆσαι
 λωΐονος δαίμονος εἶ-
 λου τὸ κάκιον αἰνεῖν. 1100
- Φι. ὦ τλάμων τλάμων ἄρ' ἐγὼ 1105
 καὶ μόχθωι λωβατός, ὃς ἦ-
 δη μετ' οὐδενὸς ὕστερον
 ἀνδρῶν εἰσοπίσω τάλας
 ναίων ἐνθάδ' ὀλοῦμαι, 1110
- αἰαὶ αἰαὶ,
 οὐ φορβὰν ἔτι προσφέρων,
 οὐ πτανῶν ἀπ' ἐμῶν ὅπλων
 κραταιαῖς μετὰ χερσὶν ἴσχων· 1115
- ἀλλὰ μοι ἄσκοπα
 κρυπτά τ' ἔπη δολεραῖς ὑπέδου φρενός·
 ἰδοίμαν δέ νιν,
 τὸν τάδε μηςάμενον, τὸν ἴσον χρόνον
 ἐμᾶς λαχόντ' ἀνίας. 1120
- Χο. πότμος, <πότμος> σε δαιμόνων
 τάδ', οὐδὲ σέ γε δόλος
 ἔσχ' ὑπὸ χειρὸς ἐμᾶς· στυγεράν ἔχε
 δύσποτμον ἄρὰν ἐπ' ἄλλοις. 1120
- καὶ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τοῦτο μέλει,
 μὴ φιλότητ' ἀπώσημι.

- Φι. οἴμοι μοι, καί που πολιᾶς στρ. β
 πόντου θινὸς ἐφήμενος,
 γελᾶι μου, χερὶ πάλλων 1125
 τὰν ἐμὰν μελέου τροφάν,
 τὰν οὐδεὶς ποτ' ἐβάστασεν.
 ὦ τόξον φίλον, ὦ φίλων
 χειρῶν ἐκβεβιασμένον,
 ἧ που ἐλεινὸν ὄρᾳς, φρένας εἴ τινας 1130
 ἔχεις, τὸν Ἡράκλειον
 ἄθλιον ὧδέ σοι
 οὐκέτι χρησόμενον τὸ μεθύστερον
 ἄλλου δ' ἐν μεταλλαγᾷ
 πολυμηχάνου ἀνδρὸς ἐρέσσηι, 1135
 ὀρῶν μὲν αἰσχροῦς ἀπάτας,
 στυγνὸν τε φῶτ' ἐχθοδοπόν,
 μυρὶ' ἀπ' αἰσχροῶν ἀνατέλ-
 λονθ' ὅσ' ἐφ' ἡμῖν κάκ' ἐμήσατ' ἔ'Οδυσσεύς†.
- Χο. ἀνδρὸς τοι τὸ μὲν ὄν δίκαιον εἰπεῖν, 1140
 εἰπόντος δὲ μὴ φθονεράν
 ἐξῶσαι γλώσσας ὀδύνας.
 κεῖνος δ' εἷς ἀπὸ πολλῶν
 ταχθεὶς τοῦδ' ἐφημοσύναι
 κοινὰν ἦνυσεν ἐς φίλους ἀρωγάν. 1145
- Φι. ὦ πταναὶ θῆραι χαροπῶν τ' ἀντ. β
 ἔθνη θηρῶν, οὓς ὄδ' ἔχει
 χῶρος οὐρεσιβώτας,
 φυγαῖ μηκέτ' ἀπ' αὐλίω
 ἐλᾶτ'· οὐ γὰρ ἔχω χεροῖν 1150
 τὰν πρόσθεν βελέων ἀλκάν,
 ὦ δύστανος ἐγὼ τανῦν·
 ἀλλ' ἀνέδην ὅδε χῶρος ἐρύκεται
 οὐκέτι φοβητὸς ὑμῖν,
 ἔρπετε, νῦν καλὸν 1155
 ἀντίφονον κορέσαι στόμα πρὸς χάριν
 ἐμᾶς σαρκὸς αἰόλας·
 ἀπὸ γὰρ βίον αὐτίκα λείψω.
 πόθεν γὰρ ἔσται βιοτά;
 τίς ὧδ' ἐν αὔραις τρέφεται, 1160
 μηκέτι μηδενοῦς κρατῶ-

- ων ὅσα πέμπει βιόδωρος αἴα;
 Χο. πρὸς θεῶν, εἴ τι σέβῃ ξένον, πέλασσον
 εὐνοίαι πάσαι πελάταν·
 ἀλλὰ γνῶθ', εὖ γνῶθ', ἐπὶ σοὶ 1165
 κῆρα τάνδ' ἀποφεύγειν·
 οἰκτρὰ γὰρ βόσκειν, ἀδαῆς δ'
 ἔχειν μυρίον ἄχθος ὧι ξυνοικεῖ.
- Φι. πάλιν, πάλιν παλαιὸν ἄλ- *astrophic amoibaion*
 γημ' ὑπέμνασας, ὦ 1170
 λώιστε τῶν πρὶν ἐντόπων.
 τί μ' ὤλεσας; τί μ' εἴργασαι;
 Χο. τί τοῦτ' ἔλεξας; Φι. εἰ σὺ τὰν [ἐμοὶ]
 στυγεράν Τρωιάδα γὰν μ' ἤλπισας ἄξειν. 1175
- Χο. τόδε γὰρ νοῶ κράτιστον.
 Φι. ἀπὸ νῦν με λείπετ' ἤδη.
 Χο. φίλα μοι, φίλα ταῦτα παρήγγει-
 λας ἐκόντι τε πράσσειν.
 ἴωμεν, ἴωμεν 1180
 ναὸς ἴν' ἡμῖν τέτακται.
 Φι. μή, πρὸς ἀραίου Διός, ἔλ-
 θης, ἱκετεύω. Χο. μετρίαζ'. Φι. ὦ ξένοι,
 μείνατε, πρὸς θεῶν. Χο. τί θροεῖς; 1185
- Φι. αἰαῖ αἰαῖ,
 δαίμων δαίμων· ἀπόλωλ' ὁ τάλας·
 ὦ πούς, πούς, τί σ' ἔτ' ἐν βίῳ
 τεύξω τῷ μετόπιν, τάλας;
 ὦ ξένοι, ἔλθετ' ἐπήλυδες αὖθις. 1190
- Χο. τί ρέξοντες; ἀλλόκοτος
 γνώμα τῶν πάρος ἂν προφαίνεις.
 Φι. οὔτοι νεμεσητὸν
 ἀλύοντα χειμερίω
 λύπαι καὶ παρὰ νοῦν θροεῖν. 1195
- Χο. βᾶθί νυν, ὦ τάλαν, ὡς σε κελεύομεν.
 Φι. οὐδέποτ', οὐδέποτ' ἴσθι τόδ' ἔμπεδον,
 οὐδ' εἰ πυρφόρος ἀστεροπητῆς
 βροντᾶς ἀυγαῖς μ' εἴσι φλογίζων.
 ἐρρέτω Ἴλιον, οἳ θ' ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ
 πάντες ὅσοι τόδ' ἔτλασεν ἐμοῦ ποδὸς 1200

- ἄρθρον ἀπῶσαι.
 [ἀλλ'] ὦ ξένοι, ἔν γέ μοι εὐχος ὀρέξατε.
 Χο. ποῖον ἐρεῖς τόδ' ἔπος; Φι. ξίφος, εἴ ποθεν,
 ἢ γένυν ἢ βελέων τι, προπέμψατε. 1205
- Χο. ὡς τίνα <δὴ> ῥέξης παλάμαν ποτέ;
 Φι. κρᾶτ' ἀπὸ πάντα καὶ ἄρθρα τέμω χερί·
 φονᾶι, φονᾶι νόος ἦδη.
 τί ποτε; Φι. πατέρα ματεύων 1210
- Χο. ποῖ γᾶς; Φι. ἐς Ἴδου.
 οὐ γὰρ ἐν φάει γ' ἔτι.
 ὦ πόλις, [ὦ] πόλις πατρία
 πῶς ἂν εἰσιδοίμ' σ' ἄθλιός γ' ἀνήρ,
 ὅς γε σὰν λιπῶν ἱεράν 1215
 λιβάδ' ἔβαν ἐχθοῖς Δαναοῖς
 ἀρωγός· ἔτ' οὐδέν εἰμι.
- [PHIL. You hollow of cavernous rock, Strophe A
 hot and icy cold by turns, so
 I wasn't, after all, ever going
 to leave you, O wretched me, but you will be
 conscious of me as I am dying. 1085
O moi moi moi.
 You wretched dwelling most full
 of pain from me,
 what now will be my daily portion?
 What hope of food will I chance on 1090
 in my misery, and from where?
 Approach, you who previously covered above,
 through the shrill-sounding wind;
 I no longer have a means of taking you.
- CHO. You, you decreed this, 1095
 O heavy-doomed man, and
 this fortune is not from another, from something greater:
 when it was possible to begin to be reasonable,
 rather than a better fate you
 chose to approve what is worse. 1100
- PHIL. O, I am miserable, miserable after all Antistrophe A
 and abused by hardships, I
 who now, with no one henceforth

of men, wretched in time to come
dwelling here will perish. 1105

Aiai aiai.

No longer bringing food here,
no longer bringing it with my winged weapons,
holding the bow in my powerful hands; 1110

but unlooked for
and deceptive words from a treacherous mind stole upon me;

I wish I could see him,
the man who plotted these things, having my pains as his
portion

for an equal length of time! 1115

CHOR. These things are doom, doom from
the gods, nor did treachery by my hand
take hold of you. Aim your hateful,
bitter-dooming curse at others. 1120

For actually this is my concern,
that you not rebuff my friendship.

PHIL. *Oimoi moi.* And surely, sitting on
the sea's white-capped shore,
he laughs at me, brandishing in his hand
my means of nourishing my miserable self,
which no one ever had handled. 1125

O bow, (my) friend, violently forced
from friendly hands,
you surely see with pity, if you have
any feeling, the Heraklean man,
thus wretched, who 1130

will no longer use you in the future,
but with a change in possession you are plied
by another, much-devising man,
seeing the shameful deceptions, 1135
the hated face of a man who is my enemy,
the infinite evils arising from shameful deeds,
as many as this man devised against us.

CHOR. It is a man's part to assert his own claim,
but when he has spoken, not to thrust forth
malicious pain from his tongue.
That man, one on behalf of many,

at the behest of this man
 accomplished a public benefit for his friends. 1145

PHIL. You winged prey and tribes of wild beasts Antistrophe B
 with flashing eyes, which this place has
 feeding in its mountains,
 no longer rush from my dwelling
 in flight, for my two hands no longer have 1150
 their previous strength of arrows—
 O, I am miserable now.

But freely—this place defends itself,
 no longer to be feared by you—
 move freely; now it is fine 1155
 to glut your mouth that returns slaughter for slaughter at our
 pleasure

on my shining flesh;
 for I will quickly lose my life.
 From where will I find the means to live?
 Who feeds himself thus on the winds, 1160
 when no longer controlling anything,
 as much as the life-giving earth sends forth?

CHOR. By the gods, if you respect a guest-friend at all, approach
 with good will
 one who approaches you with all good will;
 but know well, know it is in your power 1165
 to escape this death;
 for it is pitiable to nourish, and cannot be taught
 to bear the infinite burden with which it makes its
 home.

PHIL. Again, again you call to mind Astrophic exchange
 my old pain, though you are the best 1170
 of those who have been here before.

What have you done to me? Why did you destroy me?

CHOR. What do you mean?

PHIL. If you expected
 to bring me to the land of Troy that I detest. 1175

CHOR. Yes, I think this best.

PHIL. Then leave me alone now!

CHOR. This command of yours is welcome, welcome,

- and one I do willingly.
 Let's go, let's go
 to our various stations on the ship. 1180
- PHIL. Don't, by Zeus who hears curses, don't go,
 I beg you! CHOR. Calm down. PHIL. Strangers,
 by the gods, stay! CHOR. Why are you shouting? 1185
- PHIL. *Aiai, aiai,*
 my destiny, destiny. I am lost in my suffering!
 Foot, foot—what shall I do with you from now on,
 for the rest of my life, wretch that I am?
 Strangers, come back again! 1190
- CHOR. For what? Now you reveal
 an utterly different attitude.
- PHIL. It's nothing to be angry at,
 that a man crazed by a storm
 of grief cries out madly. 1195
- CHOR. Come, now, you wretched man, as we bid you.
- PHIL. Never, never—know that I am firm—
 not even if the fire-bearing lord of lightning
 will set me on fire with a blazing thunderbolt.
 May Ilion perish and all those beneath it,
 all who had the heart to reject 1200
 my poor, lame foot.
 Strangers, grant me one prayer at least.
- CHOR. What do you want?
- PHIL. A sword, if you have one somewhere,
 let me have it, or an axe, or any weapon. 1205
- CHOR. So you can do what violent deed?
- PHIL. So I can cut off my head and all my limbs with my own hand!
 My mind is bent on slaughter, slaughter.
- CHOR. Why?
- PHIL. To seek my father. 1210
- PHIL. Where? PHIL. In Hades,
 for he is no longer living.
 My city, my native city,
 how I wish I could see you, wretched as I am, I
 who left behind your sacred stream 1215
 and went to help the hated
 Danaans. Henceforth I am nothing.]

In Sophoclean tragedy, characters, both male and female, frequently sing in exchanges with the chorus or other characters when they are “in physical pain or extreme emotional turmoil” (Hall 2006: 309).⁴ The second *kommos* of *Philoctetes*, however, is a special case, because the Chorus function more like another character than like a typical Sophoclean chorus. In other Sophoclean tragedies, the choral lyrics condense the imagery and ideas of the drama and situate the events in a larger spiritual or intellectual framework. In *Philoctetes*, however, the Chorus are intimately implicated in the dramatic action as they support the intrigue of Odysseus and Neoptolemus against Philoctetes, and never more so than in the second *kommos*. In effect, they participate in the drama as “one of the actors” in the Sophoclean (as opposed to Euripidean) manner advocated by Aristotle at *Poetics* 18.1456a25-27 (Burton 1980: 226, Schein 1988: 196; *contra* Müller 1967: 217, Gardiner 1987: 13).⁵ The Chorus sing only one fully developed stasimon (676-729), and even that ode is in accordance with the help they provide throughout the play to Neoptolemus in carrying out Odysseus’ plan (Schmidt 1973: 118-20; Schein 2013: 228-9).

The most salient and dramatically significant feature of the *kommos* is the nearly complete lack of communication between the Chorus and Philoctetes, who throughout strophe and antistrophe α and strophe β sing past one another and barely begin to interact in antistrophe β (Pucci 2003: 284; Kitzinger 2008: 126-7). Philoctetes commences each stanza by reiterating his feelings of abandonment, anger, and despair. He had expressed similar feelings in his long speeches at 927-62 and 1004-44, but here the lyric register, which involves both song and dance, intensifies the emotional force of his words. The Chorus, however, are for the most part unresponsive: they cannot understand Philoctetes’ refusal to give in to his suffering and accompany them to Troy. They express

4 Cf. *Ai.* 348-429, *Ant.* 781-882, *Tr.* 1004-1043, *OT* 1313-66, *El.* 121-250, 1232-87, *OC* 510-48.

5 καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, καὶ μόνιον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι μὴ ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδῃ ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ Σοφοκλεῖ (“One should assume that the Chorus is one of the actors, and that it should be part of the whole and contribute in the competition [or: “in the performance”], not as in Euripides but as in Sophocles”; my translation).

qualified pity for him, but at the same time they blame him for his sufferings (1095-1100) and refuse to acknowledge the cruel and instrumental way in which Odysseus, Neoptolemus, and they themselves have treated him for their own purposes and those of the Greek army. The Chorus begin to express genuine sympathy for Philoctetes in antistrophe β (1163-8), but there is genuine interaction and dialogue between them and Philoctetes only in the lively, astrophic dialogue at 1169-217. In this dialogue, the frequent repetition of each other's words by both the Chorus and Philoctetes and the interruptions and contradictions on both sides effectively convey the intensity and emotional urgency with which Philoctetes alternately appeals to them and rejects them, whenever they mention his going to Troy.

The Chorus' "combination of weak pity and strong self-interest" (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 294), apparent throughout the *kommos*, as elsewhere in the play, stands in the way of their kindness to Philoctetes, and his despair, grief, and anger make him unable to accept their appeals in the name of friendship (1121-2) – appeals which in any case are opportunistic and not based on the reciprocity and mutual aid that typically defined friendship in classical Greece. The Chorus try to justify the words and actions of Neoptolemus (or Odysseus; see below on 1143-5), who victimized Philoctetes while "accomplish[ing] a public benefit for his friends" (1145), that is, for the Greek army. Earlier in the play, Philoctetes calls the Chorus φίλοι . . . ναῦται ("sailor friends"), after they appear to intervene with Neoptolemus on his behalf (507-18, 522-3); when he awakens after his paroxysm, he hails τό τ'ἐλπίδων / ἄπιστον οἰκούρημα τῶνδε τῶν ξένων ("the staying and watching / of these guest-friends, unbelievable (even) to my hopes", 867-8), giving his words extra force by the emphatic periphrasis, οἰκούρημα τῶνδε τῶν ξένων ("the staying and watching of these guest-friends"), in place of the more straightforward οἱ ξένοι οἰκουροῦντες ("the strangers staying and watching") (Long 1968: 99n127). In the second *kommos*, however, Philoctetes' only "friend" is his bow (ὦ τόξον φίλον, 1128), and he refers to the Chorus, and they refer to themselves, by using the word ξένοι differently and more distantly to mean "strangers" or "foreigners" rather than "guest-friends" (1163, 1184, 1190, 1203). In the same way, Philoctetes

calls Neoptolemus ξέβε (“stranger”) at line 923, when he realizes that he has betrayed their newly established friendship (cf. 658-9, 671-3) and destroyed him by stealing the bow in order to force him to go to Troy. He had not used this word of Neoptolemus since 219, when he first met him, addressing him instead as as τέκνον (“child”) or παῖ (“son”), terms which testify not only to the intimacy and depth of their relationship but to a shared nature that would make Neoptolemus symbolically the son of Philoctetes, as he is literally the son of Achilles.⁶ It is no accident that after the *kommos*, when the action resumes with the re-entry of Neoptolemus and Odysseus at 1221 and the triumphant refusal of Neoptolemus to surrender to Odysseus the bow that he eventually returns to Philoctetes (1291-2), the Chorus retreat into a silence, which they maintain for c. 250 lines until the play’s final verses, when they pray equivocally for “a safe return home” (1471) (Schein 1988: 202-3, 2013: 345-6). Because they have betrayed Philoctetes and, unlike Neoptolemus, show no change of heart, they are as irrelevant to the play’s ‘happy ending’ as is Odysseus himself, whose intrigue they had aided.

The main rhetorical features of strophe and antistrophe α and β are Philoctetes’ apostrophes to his cave and to other natural elements of the island, including its birds and wild beasts. The Chorus do not echo, share in, or respond to these apostrophes or Philoctetes’ lamentation (Nooter 2012: 139). Earlier in the play, before actual meeting Philoctetes, the Chorus express genuine pity for the pain of his wretched, lonely existence (169-90), which they imagine vividly and sympathetically; they voice similar pity and sympathy again in the central stasimon of the play (676-717), even though they conclude this stasimon with a feigned celebration of his rescue and imminent return home with the help of Neoptolemus, in full knowledge that the plan is to take him forcibly to Troy (718-29). When, however, Philoctetes realizes that they have helped Neoptolemos and Odysseus to steal his bow and ren-

6 E.g. 874-5; cf. 1310-13. Philoctetes calls Neoptolemus παῖ (“son”) or τέκνον (“child”) 52 times in the play (Avery 1965: 285). In the end he wins what amounts to a competition with Odysseus to be an appropriate father-figure for Neoptolemus.

der him helpless, the Chorus no longer express sympathy and pity, and in the second *kommos* they blame Philoctetes himself for his sufferings, even while urging him to surrender to their persuasion, which serves the interests of Odysseus and Neoptolemus.

Philoctetes begins the second *kommos* with an apostrophe to his cave, hot and cold by turns (1082), which he will never leave and which will witness his dying (1081-5), since he no longer can hope to provide food for himself (1090-1). His realistic description of the cave's climate contrasts with Odysseus' idyllic description in the Prologue, when he is trying to make it seem that Philoctetes is not as uncomfortable as might be thought:

σκοπεῖν θ' ὅπου 'στ' ἐνταῦθα δίστομος πέτρα
 τοιάδ', ἴν' ἐν ψύχει μὲν ἡλίου διπλῆ
 πάρεστιν ἐνθάκησις, ἐν θέρει δ' ὕπνον
 δι' ἀμφιτρῆτος ἀλίου πέμπει πνοή.

[and look for where there is a two-mouthed rock-cave nearby,
 the sort where in winter there is a double possibility
 of sitting in the sun's warmth, and in summer
 a cool breeze sends sleep through a grotto open at both ends.
 (16-19)]

Philoctetes proceeds to personify the cave, addressing it as "You wretched dwelling / most full of pain from me" (ὦ πληρέστατον αὐλίον / λύπας τᾶς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τάλαν, 1087-8); he makes it clear that he turns to it when all humans have betrayed him, and at the same time virtually identifies it with himself and his feelings, as if the cave has somehow 'caught' his pain as one catches a disease—or, in Greek terms, a pollution. Philoctetes' identification with the cave suggests that he himself has become part of the island's landscape; it anticipates his description of how, as prey for the birds he no longer can hunt for his own food (1146-59), he has become part of the island's ecological system. Philoctetes concludes his portion of strophe α by calling on the birds, who used to cower from him, to fly freely on high, since he has no means to kill them (1092-4).⁷

To all this the Chorus respond unsympathetically by making

⁷ These corrupt lines have attracted many conjectures: see Jebb 1898: 247, Jackson 1955: 114-7. I print and translate Jackson's text.

Philoctetes himself responsible for his suffering (1095-1100):

σύ τοι, σύ τοι κατηξίω-	1095
σας, ὦ βαρύποτμε, κούκ	
ἄλλοθεν ἄ τύχα ἄδ' ἀπό μείζονος,	
εὔτέ γε παρὸν φρονῆσαι	
λωίονος δαίμονος εἶ-	
λου τὸ κάκιον αἰνεῖν.	1100
 [You, you decreed this,	1095
O heavy-doomed man, and	
this fortune is not from another, from something greater:	
when it was possible to begin to be reasonable,	
rather than a better fate you	
chose to approve what is worse.	1100]

Clearly, the Chorus' main concern is to avoid being blamed themselves and to insist that Philoctetes deserves his sufferings, because he chose them, presumably by refusing to leave the island and go to Troy when given the opportunity. This completely ignores both his cruel abandonment on Lemnos by Odysseus ten years earlier (4-11, 271-84) and Odysseus' plan to steal the bow, which Neoptolemus and the Chorus themselves have successfully carried out. By "this fortune from something greater" (ἄ τύχα ἄδ' ἀπὸ μείζονος) and "heavy-doomed" (βαρύποτμε), the Chorus imply that Philoctetes'(mis)fortune is random, yet at the same time the result of an impersonal doom that has befallen or rushed down upon him.⁸ This would seem to contradict their assertion that he "chose to approve the worse" rather than a "better fate" (λωίονος δαίμονος εἶ- / λου τὸ κάκιον αἰνεῖν, 1099-1100),⁹ and the play makes it perfectly clear that he is a victim of human planning and agency.

In the first fifteen lines of antistrophe α, Philoctetes utterly

⁸ For πότμος as cognate with πίπτω ("fall") and πέτομαι ("fly", "rush", "fall suddenly upon"), see Chantraine 1968-80: 906, and Frisk 1960-72: 2.543, both s.v. πίπτω.

⁹ δαίμων originally means a god, then a human lot or destiny ordained or brought about by a god. δαίμων differs from τύχη ("fortune"), because it lacks an element of randomness or chance.

ignores what the Chorus have just sung and continues to lament his miserable existence, alone and helpless, and his coming death by starvation, because he no longer has his bow with which to provide food. His repeated use of the first person in 1101-15 suggests a need to affirm his existence and selfhood, which seem to him in effect to have been nullified by the way he has been treated. He blames the “unlooked for / and deceptive words from a treacherous mind [that] stole upon me” (1111-12) and wishes that “I could see him, the man who plotted these things, having my pains as his portion / for an equal length of time” (1113-15). This wish, in effect a curse, echoes more forcefully the wish expressed in his first long speech to Neoptolemos, that “the gods might grant to (Odysseus and the sons of Atreus) to suffer such things (as I have suffered) / as payment in return (for what) they have done to me” (315-6).

In their portion of antistrophe α (1116-22), the Chorus do not respond directly to Philoctetes' words and show no interest in his suffering. Instead, perhaps feeling included in his curse against Odysseus (or taking it as a curse against Neoptolemos), they defend themselves by again insisting that “doom, doom from the gods” (πότμος, <πότμος> . . . δαμόνων, 1116), not their own treachery, was responsible for what happened to Philoctetes; therefore, he should not turn his “hateful, bitter-dooming curse” (στυγεράν . . . / δύσποτμον ἄράν, 1119-20) against them and “not reject [their] friendship” (μὴ φιλότητ' ἀπόσηι, 1122). Their defensiveness and lack of concern for Philoctetes are made more conspicuous by their assertion of “friendship”, which by definition should involve regard for another, but in this case clearly does not do so.

Philoctetes begins strophe β as if the Chorus had not intervened in 1116-22 and he were continuing directly from 1115. Having sung of the “deceptive words from a treacherous mind [that] stole upon me” (1112), he now, without actually naming Odysseus, refers to him as the bow's new, “much-devising” master and imagines him laughing at Philoctetes, as he wields the weapon which Philoctetes himself will never again use. Then he movingly apostrophizes and personifies the “bow, (my) friend, violently forced from friendly hands” (ὦ τόξον φίλον, ὦ φίλων / χειρῶν ἐκβεβιασμένον, 1128-9); “you surely see with pity (ἐλείνδον

ὀρᾶις),” he says, as “you are now plied by the man of many devices” (πολυμήχανος ἀνδρὸς ἐρέσσηι, 1130), an unmistakable reference to Odysseus by one of his most common Homeric epithets. By calling the bow his “friend” and insisting on the reciprocal friendship between it and his hands, Philoctetes rejects the notion that the Chorus, who refuse to pity him and support the treachery of his hated enemy, can be sincere in urging him not to reject their friendship. He then continues the personification of the bow in terms of its vision, describing it as “seeing (ὁρῶν) the shameful deceptions, / the hated face of a man who is my enemy, / the infinite evils arising from shameful deeds, / as many as this man devised against us” (1136-9).¹⁰

In the final six lines of strophe β, the Chorus respond to Philoctetes’ words impersonally, indirectly, and again without sympathy: “It is a man’s part to assert his own claim, / but when he has spoken, not to thrust forth / malicious pain from his tongue” (ἀνδρὸς τοι τὸ μὲν ὄν δίκαιον εἰπεῖν, / εἰπόντος δὲ μὴ φθονεράν / ἐξῶσαι γλώσσας ὀδύναν, 1140-2). In other words, in making his own claim, a man should not hurt with rancorous speech. The Chorus appear to acknowledge that Philoctetes has spoken like a man, but implicitly accuse him of going too far out of malice toward Odysseus. The word γλώσσας is ambiguous, suggesting both “tongue” (the physical organ) and “speech”, and “thrust forth” (ἐξῶσαι) evokes the strongly physical image of the tongue thrusting forth from the mouth like a weapon. Although the Chorus clearly have Philoctetes in mind, the words “thrust forth malicious pain from his tongue” (ἐξῶσαι γλώσσας ὀδύναν) raise the possibility that they also are thinking, perhaps unconsciously, of Odysseus. Earlier in the play Odysseus had described “speech, not actions”, as “leading the way in all things” (τὴν γλώσσαν, οὐχὶ τᾶργα πάνθ’ ἡγουμένην, 99), and his name may perhaps be heard (by a kind of word-play) in the word ὀδύναν.¹¹

¹⁰ On the textual difficulties in this passage, see Schein 2013: 297.

¹¹ In tragedy and Greek thought generally, speech is usually opposed unfavorably to action (e.g. Eur. *Hec.* 1187-8; cf. Soph. *OC* 806-7; Eur. *Ba.* 268-9), but Odysseus characteristically reverses the force of this opposition. Cf. 407-9, where Philoctetes says disparagingly that Odysseus “would apply his tongue to every evil speech | and every villainy by which he might

The Chorus continue their response to Philoctetes with another comment that is clearly defensive, though it is not certain whom they are defending: "That man, one on behalf of many, / at the behest of this man / accomplished a public benefit for his friends" (κεῖνος δ' εἷς ἀπὸ πολλῶν / ταχθεῖς τοῦδ' ἐφημοσύναι / κοινὰν ἦνυσεν ἐς φίλους ἀρωγὰν, 1143-5). They do not name either Odysseus or Neoptolemus, and in this way they create another ambiguity, leaving it the audience or readers to decide for themselves the identities of "this man" and "that man". τοῦδ' ἐφημοσύναι ("at the behest of this man") should refer to Odysseus, and κεῖνος ("that man") to Neoptolemus. This also seems likely because in 1134-39 Philoctetes has clearly been referring to Odysseus, and the Chorus' κεῖνος should refer to someone more "remote". They certainly are concerned to justify their own king (cf. 1095-1101, 1116-21), and if κεῖνος does refer to Neoptolemus, they would be doing so on the ground that he was merely following orders (Pucci 2003: 288). On the other hand, Odysseus uses ταχθεῖς ("at the behest of", "having been ordered") in line 6 to describe himself as having been ordered by his "commanders" (τῶν ἀνασσόντων) ten years earlier to maroon Philoctetes on Lemnos, so κεῖνος . . . ταχθεῖς might call to mind Odysseus as well as Neoptolemus.¹²

In antistrophe β Philoctetes utterly ignores the Chorus' defense of Neoptolemus (or Odysseus) and turns again to his natural surroundings. He calls on the island's birds and wild beasts to fear him no longer, wretched and helpless as he now is, but to "move freely" and "glut your mouth that returns slaughter for slaughter at your pleasure| on my shining flesh" (ἀντίφρονον κορέσαι στόμα πρὸς χάριν / ἐμᾶς σαρκὸς αἰόλας, 1155-7; cf. 1092-4). Philoctetes sings a lament for himself as having merged into the natural rhythms and animal ecology of the island, which recalls

achieve / an end that is in no way just"; Eur. *Tro.* 285-8, where Hecuba speaks of Odysseus as one "who twists everything from that side to this, / and then back again to that, / with his twofold tongue / making what was formerly loved unloved". On the broader political and cultural significance of Odysseus' validation of speech over action, see Schein 2013: 137-8, on *Phil.* 96-99.

¹² Philoctetes recalls Odysseus' claim to be following orders at 1028 (cf. 1024).

with heightened lyric intensity his words at 957-8: θανῶν παρέξω δαῖτ' ὑφ' ὧν ἐφερβόμην, / καὶ μ'οὖς ἐθήρων πρόσθε θηράσουσι νῦν ("Dead, I will provide a feast for the animals by whom I was fed, / and those whom I used to hunt before will now hunt me."). In a sense, this reciprocal activity constitutes and expresses a special kind of friendship, like that between him and his bow in strophe β—a friendship grounded in solidarity with the inanimate objects and non-human animals that help to define his identity and by which he cannot be deceived, as he was by Neoptolemos and the Chorus. Like the rock-cave, which is simultaneously a natural element of the island and the home he has made for himself (40, 533-4), Philoctetes himself is now an element of both nature and culture.

For the first time in this lyric sequence, the Chorus are manifestly affected by Philoctetes' expressions of helplessness and despair and by his lamentation, but they do not respond directly. Instead, invoking the gods, they call on him to "approach with all good will / one who approaches you with all good will" (πέλασσον / εὐνοίαι πάσαι πελάταν, 1163-4), in implicit contrast to his calling on the birds and beasts of Lemnos to come and devour him (1149-50, 1153-7). The Chorus urge Philoctetes to realize that "it is in your power / to escape this death" (ἀλλὰ γνῶθ', εὖ γνῶθ', ἐπὶ σοὶ / κῆρα τάνδ' ἀποφεύγειν, 1163) – the same death that Philoctetes foresees in 1155-62. The Chorus now no longer blame Philoctetes for his sufferings, but pity him, "for it (*sc.* the κῆρ) is pitiable to nourish and cannot be taught / to bear the infinite burden with which it makes its home" (οἰκτρὰ γὰρ βόσκειν, ἀδαῆς δ' / ἔχειν μυρίον ἄχθος ὧι ξυνοικεῖ, 1167-8). In these difficult lines, the Chorus no longer try defend themselves from blame, but express sympathy for Philoctetes by imaginatively combining the "death" (κῆρ) that he foresees with the disease that causes him so much pain and helplessness. In 1167, this κῆρ is separate from the person who feeds it with his flesh (*cf.* 41-2, 313), but in 1168 it and the person have merged into a single entity, which is said to cohabit with the burden (of suffering) produced by the κῆρ.¹³

13 For "cohabit" (ξυνοικεῖω) used of a torment or evil so closely combined with a person that it can be said to share that person's home, *cf.* Soph. *Tr.*

Although *πελάζω* ("approach", 1163) and *πελάτης* ("the one who approaches", 1164) do not occur elsewhere in the *kommos*, much of the astrophic dialogue between Philoctetes and the chorus (1169-217) is in terms of approach and withdrawal, welcome and rejection, coming and going. Throughout this impassioned dialogue, Philoctetes refuses to approach the Chorus, despite their expressed desire that he "not reject [their] friendship" (1122), and they remain *ξένοι* ("strangers", 1184, 1203), not "friends" (*φίλοι*). Nevertheless, the exchange looks forward to 1403, when Philoctetes does approach Neoptolemus, leaning on him for physical support as they depart for the ship, and Philoctetes reciprocates this friendly support when he promises to use his Heraklean arrows to prevent the Greeks, their common enemies, from "approaching" (*πελάζειν*) Neoptolemus' land to lay it waste (1403-5). In the course of the astrophic dialogue, when the Chorus begin to leave because Philoctetes refuses to consider accompanying them to Troy, he calls out for them to "come back again" (1190). When they ask, "For what? Now you reveal / an utterly different attitude" (1191-2), Philoctetes' replies, "It's nothing to be angry at, / that a man crazed by a storm / of grief cries out madly" (*οὔτοι νεμεσητόν / ἀλύοντα χειμερίωι / λύπαι καὶ παρὰ νοῦν θροεῖν*, 1193-5). The word I translate as "nothing to be angry at" (*νεμεσητόν*) is striking: although familiar from Homeric epic, it occurs only here in surviving Attic tragedy. It is "a very social word" (Winnington-Ingram 1980: 294), implying that Philoctetes and the Chorus share fundamental values and that his irrationality and way of speaking, so full of contradictions, remain within the bounds of what is socially acceptable and look forward to his ultimate willingness to "approach" Neoptolemos.

Nevertheless, at the end of the dialogue, Philoctetes refuses to accompany the Chorus and withdraws into the cave. His final words, *ἔτ' οὐδέν εἰμι* ("Henceforth I am nothing"), suggest that he is terminally helpless and at the point of death.¹⁴ They call to mind

1055, *OC* 1133-4. For *ξύνεμι* ("be with") used in a similar sense, see *Ai.* 337-8, *OC* 945-6.

¹⁴ Cf. 951 *οὐδέν εἰμι' ὁ δύσμορος* ("I, the ill-fated man, am nothing"), *Tr.* 161 *ὡς ἔτ' οὐκ ὦν* ("as henceforth not existing"), *OC* 393 *ὄτ' οὐκέτ' εἰμί*

his assertions at 946, 1018, and 1030 that he is already a ‘corpse’ and symbolically ‘dead’.¹⁵ As Oliver Taplin has observed, the dramatic action “now comes to a kind of full stop” (1971: 39). This dramatic situation must have surprised the audience, who would have expected, from their familiarity with traditional mythology and with earlier dramatizations of the story, that Philoctetes would leave the island, be healed, kill Paris in an archery duel, and help to win the war. In addition, the ambiguity throughout the play as to whether Philoctetes or the bow or both are needed at Troy would have invited them, at least momentarily, to consider what it might mean if the dramatic action had truly ended with Philoctetes’ retreat into the cave and the departure of Odysseus, Neoptolemus, and the Chorus for Troy. To be sure, the action begins anew at 1221 with the entry of Neoptolemus and Odysseus, arguing, but just a few lines earlier it seems that Odysseus’ Real-Politik has actually triumphed and that Neoptolemus and Odysseus will take the bow to Troy, leaving Philoctetes to starve to death.

This is the first of several points in the dramatic action at which the play flirts with the possibility of an ending different from what an audience or readers might have expected. The others are (1) 1395-7, when Neoptolemus, who has returned the bow to Philoctetes but cannot persuade him to come to Troy, says that it would be “easiest for me to stop talking and for you / to go on living as you’ve been living, without salvation” and Philoctetes replies, “Let me suffer what I must suffer”; (2) 1398-408, when Philoctetes urges Neoptolemus to bring him home to Malis as he had promised, Neoptolemus agrees to do so, and the two men set out for the ship;¹⁶ (3) the actual ending of the play, when Herakles

(“when henceforth I do not exist”).

¹⁵ See Schein 2013: 16, 178, on line 311.

¹⁶ Neoptolemus never promised to take Philoctetes home, as Philoctetes claims here and at 941 and 1367-8. Perhaps Philoctetes conflates Neoptolemus’ promise to stay with him while he sleeps off his paroxysm, when he takes Philoctetes’ right hand in his own in a formal gesture of friendship (813), with Neoptolemus’ earlier, equivocally phrased agreement to take him where he wants to go (526-9). In the end, however, Neoptolemus decides to keep this promise that he never actually made.

intervenes *ex machina* at 1409, tells Philoctetes that he has come as a friend, role model, and spokesman for Zeus, and commands him to go to Troy and win “undying glory” along with Neoptolemus (1409-44), and Philoctetes obeys his friend’s words (1445-8). All of these ‘endings’, like that at 1217, challenge audiences and readers familiar with the traditional mythology and engaged by the strikingly original plot of Sophocles’ play,¹⁷ to try to achieve interpretive clarity by asking themselves, “What would it mean if the play were to stop here?” It is characteristic of *Philoctetes* that nothing the Chorus or the characters say or do, at any of the points where an ending momentarily seems possible, provides a definitive answer to this question.

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¹⁷ Sophocles’ two main innovations were, of course, making Lemnos an uninhabited island, thus intensifying Philoctetes sense of isolation and his emotional pain, and introducing Neoptolemus into the story in which he had not figured previously, which gives the play remarkable dramatic and emotional complexity. In particular, the introduction of Neoptolemus makes possible a contrast between innocence and experience in the realm of politics, a critique of traditional conceptions of heroism and nobility that seems to go beyond anything in the Philoctetes-plays of Aeschylus and Euripides, and an example of character development and change of mind that is rare in surviving Greek literature.

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