

The Appropriation of a Son: Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

Hanna M. Roisman

MANHOOD in archaic and classical Greece—as in modern times—is generally manifested not so much in relationships with women as in relationships with other men, especially in the relationship between father and son. The Greek male is expected to produce sons who will continue his *oikos* (e.g. Soph. *Ant.* 641–45; Eur. *Alc.* 621f, 654–57). Further, as Hesiod makes clear, sons should resemble their fathers in both looks and conduct, especially the latter (*Op.* 182, 235; cf. *Il.* 6.476–81; Theophr. *Char.* 5.5). Such resemblance earns the father public esteem and proves his manliness; the lack of it may be cause for disparagement and calls his manliness into question.¹ We learn from *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* that Sophocles follows the Hesiodic imperative that sons should resemble their fathers in their natures and their accomplishments. Ajax sees himself as an unworthy son, having lost Achilles' arms to Odysseus, and prefers to commit suicide rather than face his father, Telamon, who took part in Heracles' expedition to Troy and got Hesione, the best part of the booty, as a reward (*Aj.* 430–40, 462–65, 470ff, 1300–303; Diod. 4.32.5). At the same time, he expects his son, Eurysaces, to be like himself in nature, valor, and in everything else (τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ὅμοιος, *Aj.* 545–51).

Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, on the other hand, presents the struggle between Odysseus and Philoctetes for the 'paternity' of Neoptolemus, as each tries to mold the young man in his own

¹ Even in contemporary Greece the intense male rivalry for proving oneself takes place among men alone, while women and flocks serve as the object of this rivalry. Social division otherwise separates the lives of men and women, and their intermingling in public is mostly for communal and ritualistic events. See M. Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood* (Princeton 1985) 51–67. For manhood as a social construct of which the relationship between fathers and sons is only one facet, see V. SEIDLER, *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* (London 1994: hereafter 'Seidler') 109–20. For paternal pride in sons see B. S. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons* (Princeton 1994) 73–76.

image. Philoctetes aims to return him to the heroic ways of his biological father, the dead Achilles; Odysseus aims to draw him away from all that Achilles was and stood for. The essential trait of Greek masculinity, a father's relationship with his sons, here takes the form of a relentless rivalry in which how well each transmits his line through physical resemblance, character, and conduct is potentially as much a source of competition as military prowess and social and political position.

Although scholars often note in passing that the relationships between Neoptolemus and the other older participants recall those of fathers and sons, they ultimately focus on the opposition between the *arete* (excellence) of *ergon* (action) and the *arete* of *logos* (word or rhetoric) that comes to play in the tragedy, rather than on the theme of paternity.² In this paper I shall focus on the struggle between Philoctetes and Odysseus over the paternity of Neoptolemus as effected by the conflict between *ergon* and *logos*. These conflicting values, which were already opposed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, mark two different images of manhood in ancient Greek culture: the forthright heroic warrior, like Achilles, who makes his mark by the force of his strong fighting arm, and the cunning man of wits, exemplified by Odysseus, whose stratagems and verbal skills may also win the day. On one level, the opposition is between noble and ignoble, truth and falsity, and the preferred value is clear. On another level, given the strong practical strain running through Greek thought, the question is less what is 'right' on some abstract plane than what is for the public good. Which version of manhood will advance the interest of the polity? In the play Neoptolemus has to choose between the two types of men exemplified by Odysseus and Philoctetes as his rôle models, and the question is which one will he follow.

To a considerable extent, Odysseus bases his own conception of manhood on his ability to use guile and deception for the common good, rather than on straightforward military valor. Greek literature shows a constant concern with deception. Men criticize deception, suspect each other of it, and warn each other against it. And yet they constantly deceive each other. The ability to counter deception became a measure of manhood as it is today; the ability to deceive was approved when it was

² B. M. W. KNOX, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley 1964: hereafter 'Knox') 122-27; C. Gill, "Bow, Oracle, and Epiphany in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *GaR* 27 (1980) 143.

undertaken for the benefit of the community.³ Thus, in his effort to prove his manhood, Odysseus freely boasts in the Phaeacian court of his *dolos* (trick) of the Trojan horse and goes so far as to ask Demodocus to sing about it (*Od.* 8.487–98). In *Philoctetes*, Sophocles dramatizes the tension between his society's conflicting attitudes by condemning deception through the figure of Philoctetes and permitting Odysseus to praise *dolos*. Theoretically, if Neoptolemus chooses Philoctetes as his rôle model, the Achillean mode of conduct prevails, and Neoptolemus could be seen as a son worthy of his father. If he follows in Odysseus' footsteps, he forsakes the noble ways of his father and succumbs to the 'end-justifies-the-means' mode of behavior, and Achilles is bereft of progeny in terms of values. But the antithesis between *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (nurture) also forms part of the discussion. I shall treat the ways and means that each older hero uses to appropriate Neoptolemus as a son, how Neoptolemus rejects their efforts, and how Heracles in fact in the end succeeds unexpectedly where Odysseus and Philoctetes have failed. I shall focus on the character of Neoptolemus as a young man who does not resemble his father either in values or courage, and who throughout the play exhibits a fluid personality of a yet unformed and thus an untrustworthy core. And finally, I shall show how, independently of Odysseus' success in appropriating Neoptolemus, the young man's persona and whereabouts translate into what one may perceive as the impaired manhood of Achilles.

I. Odysseus' Need to Undo Achilles' Heritage

In the second half of the play, when Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus to give him back Heracles' bow, he bids the youth: ἀλλὰ νῦν ἔτ' ἐν σαυτῷ γενοῦ (950, "But now be according to your true nature again!").

The meaning of this verse is clarified some three hundred lines later, when Philoctetes tells Neoptolemus that by returning the bow he has proven himself a *true* son of Achilles and not a son of Sisyphus, *i.e.*, Odysseus: τὴν φύσιν δ' ἔδειξας, ὦ τέκνον, ἐξ ἧς ἔβλαστες, οὐχὶ Σισύφου πατρὸς, ἀλλ' ἐξ Ἀχιλλέως, ὃς μετὰ ζώντων ὄτ' ἦν ἤκου' ἄριστα, νῦν δὲ τῶν τεθνηκότων (1310–13: "O child, you have proven the lineage from

³ Herzfeld (*supra* n.1) 163–205.

which you have sprung: not Sisyphus is your father, but Achilles, who was the best when alive, I hear, and now the noblest of the dead.”). His return of the bow metaphorically restores Neoptolemus to his true lineage, proving that he is not the foster child of Odysseus, Sisyphus’ grandson, but the true son of Achilles.

Bearing sons to continue the line, as we have seen, is one of the main responsibilities of the Athenian male. Through the male line property and family tradition are preserved. Successful fathers have sons who resemble them in character, attitudes, and physical appearance. Generational differences in these areas mark the deterioration of Hesiod’s iron age.⁴ Throughout most of the *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus’ inborn nature (*physis*), inherited from his father Achilles, a man of deeds rather than words, is taken for granted (79, 88).⁵ Odysseus, at the opposite end of the moral spectrum, justifies the end and the means. He tells Neoptolemus that as a youth he preferred action to words, but became wiser with age. As the plot develops, the battle between Odysseus and Philoctetes for the heart of Neoptolemus recasts itself into a battle for a son, in which Philoctetes represents the dead Achilles.⁶

In the context of the plot, Odysseus’ need to get Neoptolemus to retrieve Heracles’ powerful bow and bring Philoctetes back with them to Troy requires that he *undo* Achilles’ heritage.⁷ But Neoptolemus suggests getting the bow from Philoc-

⁴ *Op.* 182: οὐδὲ πατὴρ παιδεσσιν ὁμοίος οὐδέ τι παῖδες (“Father does not accord with his children, nor do children with their father”), as opposed to the just city where (*Op.* 235) τίκτουσιν δὲ γυναῖκες ἑοικότα τέκνα γονεῦσιν (“and women bear children resembling their fathers”). Cf. also M. L. West, *Hesiod, Works and Days* (Oxford 1978) *ad loc.* Cf. Aeschin. 3.110f, the curse on those who do not keep to the oath of the Amphictyons includes *inter alia* that their wives bear children *not* like those who begot them, but monsters: μήτε γυναῖκας τέκνα τίκτειν γονεῦσιν ἑοικότα, ἀλλὰ τέρατα.

⁵ For inborn excellence passing from father to son see esp. Pind. *Pyth.* 8.44; Theog. 535–81; Soph. fr. 808 Radt; Eur. fr. fr. 232, 298, 520 Nauck²; cf. M. W. Blundell, “The *Physis* of Neoptolemus in Sophocles’s *Philoctetes*,” *GaR* 35 (1988) 138–48 with bibliography.

⁶ For the resemblance between the qualities of Philoctetes and Achilles and their views regarding life and society, see C. R. Beye, “Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* and the Homeric Embassy,” *TAPA* 101 (1970) 63–75 with bibliography.

⁷ For the issue of the late announcement of Philoctetes’ personal presence as a condition for the fall of Troy, see A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, tr. J. Willis and C. de Heer (New York 1966) 291f; Gill (*supra* n.2: 137–46) argues convincingly for Neoptolemus’ intuitive understanding, as the plot evolves, of the necessity for Philoctetes’ presence, although Sophocles does not

tetes alternatively by (honest) persuasion and by force. Odysseus must bring him round to this own course of verbal trickery.⁸ In his inclination to physical action, his pursuit of fame, and his contempt for verbal deception, Neoptolemus exhibits the more prominent features of his father, Achilles, who chose a short but glorious life over old age and namelessness, and who says that he hates men who say one thing but mean another as much as he hates the gates of Hades (*Il.* 9.312f). In Hesiod's terminology, Neoptolemus is ὁμοῖος to his father: he is Achilles' true son, carrying on his ethical legacy. To convince Neoptolemus to operate in accord with his own end-justifies-the-means philosophy, Odysseus must get him to abandon his father's ethical legacy and must make him his own son: *homoios* to him—a young man who agrees with him in attitude and conduct, though not in looks. This is an achievement that, if carried off, will deprive Achilles of his only-begotten son.

(a) *The Mythic Arsenal.* Odysseus' attempt to reform—and appropriate—Neoptolemus takes place against the background of the mythic arsenal that Sophocles had at his disposal, in which Odysseus' continuing rivalry with the dead Achilles is a prominent feature. In the *Odyssey* the rivalry emerges clearly in Odysseus' meeting with Achilles' spirit in the otherworld. Like the encounters that precede it, Odysseus describes the meeting to his host Alcinous to show how much better off he is than all the great heroes: they may have been more prominent

make plain how much the youth actually knows about the oracle at the start of the play. Gill's claim (142), however, that the oracle demands a "genuine reconciliation" between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes as an essential precondition of the Greek capture of Troy, is unattested. M. C. Hoppin, "What Happens in Sophocles' 'Philoctetes'?" *Traditio* 37 (1981) 9–30, suggests that both Odysseus and Neoptolemus are fully aware from the beginning of the play that they must bring both Philoctetes and his bow to Troy. Her thesis relies mainly on audience expectations imprinted through epic traditions as well as the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides. Were Sophocles to embark on a different route he should have and would have announced it more explicitly. We should remember, however, that there was an interval of twenty-two years between Euripides' and Sophocles' plays—a time lapse that would allow forgetting, not to to say a new set of spectators. The claim that if Sophocles departed substantially from the known myth he would have stated his special purposes clearly seems to go against the grain of dramatic treatment of any sort, in which mythic versions might often be deduced rather than found in explicit detail.

⁸ See also H. M. Roisman, "Guileful Ajax and Guileless Odysseus?" *Text and Presentation* 19 (1998) forthcoming.

than he while they were alive; and, unlike him, who lost all his men, they may have returned home from the Trojan War with most of their crews, but now *they are dead* and he is not.⁹ And lest anyone doubt it, he has Achilles commend the superiority of survival, even under the most humble and inglorious conditions: Μῆ δὴ μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα, φάιδιμ' Ὀδυσσεῦ. Βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω, ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρῳ, ᾧ μὴ βίωτος πολὺς εἶη, ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν (*Od.* 11.488–91: “Do not speak to me about death, glorious Odysseus. I would prefer to be on earth working as a hired worker to a man of no allotted land, whose livelihood was but small, than to be a ruler over all the souls that have perished”).

The undercurrent of rivalry continues when, according to Odysseus, Achilles expresses the wish to hear about his son. Typically, the forever ironic Odyssean muse lets Achilles approach Odysseus—a man he may have hated as much as the gates of Hades—to ask about Neoptolemus: ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τοῦ παιδὸς ἀγαθοῦ μῦθον ἐνίσπες, ἢ ἔπετ' ἐς πόλεμον πρόμος ἔμμεναι, ἢ καὶ οὐκί (*Od.* 11.492f: “But come, tell me the story about my noble son, whether he followed along to become a commander in war, or not”). Tellingly, Achilles asks not about his son's general whereabouts, whether he is still alive, whether he is married, successful, and so forth, but about whether or not he carried on his legacy and became a principal leader in the Trojan War. Achilles wants to know how similar his son is to himself. Odysseus well understands the emotional import of the question to Achilles, for he had only a bit earlier posed a similar question to the spirit of his dead mother about his own son, Telemachus, whom he had not seen since he left for the war.¹⁰ Nonetheless, or perhaps because of his understanding, he refuses to give Achilles the satisfaction of hearing that Neoptolemus was the indubitable hero that he wants him to be. Instead, Odysseus presents himself as something of the boy's mentor or leader. It was he who brought Neoptolemus from Scyros to join the Greek host warring at Troy, he says, and then goes on to praise before anything else, not the boy's fighting skills, but rather his distinction in counsel: ἢ τοι ὄτ' ἀμφὶ πόλιν

⁹ Cf. F. Ahl and H. M. Roisman, *The Odyssey—Reformed* (Ithaca 1996) 137–46.

¹⁰ For the similarities between Odysseus and Telemachus, see H. M. Roisman, “Like Father like Son, Telemachus' *kerdeia*,” *RhM* 136 (1993) 1–22.

Τροίην φραζοίμεθα βουλᾶς, αἰεὶ πρῶτος ἔβαζε καὶ οὐχ ἡμάρτανε μύθων· Νέστωρ ἀντίθεος καὶ ἐγὼ νικάσκομεν οἴω (*Od.* 11.510ff: “Indeed whenever we took counsel around the city of Troy, he was always first to speak and did not err in words, godlike Nestor and I alone surpassed him, I think”). Such distinction in council would have mattered little to Achilles, who prides himself on his excellence in war and voluntarily yields the realm of argument to others: ἀγορῇ δέ τ’ ἀμείνονές εἰσι καὶ ἄλλοι (*Il.* 18.106, “in council others are better”).¹¹ But it is the realm in which Odysseus boasts his superiority to the rival who outshines him in warfare: ὦ Ἀχιλεῦ, Πηληϊὸς υἱέ, μέγα φέρτατ’ Ἀχαιῶν, κρείσσων εἰς ἐμέθεν καὶ φέρτερος οὐκ ὀλίγον περ ἔγχει, ἐγὼ δέ κε σεῖο νοήματί γε προβαλοίμην πολλόν (*Il.* 19.216–19, “O Achilles, son of Peleus, the mightiest of the Achaeans by far, you are better than I am and mightier not a little with the spear, but in counsel I surpass you by far”). With this assertion at the beginning of his description of Neoptolemus, Odysseus distances Neoptolemus from his father and casts him as a closer replica of himself. At the same time, he keeps the traditional hierarchy of the generations clear by noting that Neoptolemus is not the best speaker, but second to Nestor and himself. In naming Nestor, Odysseus elevates rhetoric to a more noble skill, while depriving Neoptolemus of pre-eminence in it.

Odysseus’ praise of Neoptolemus’ martial abilities, which comes after the qualified praise of his rhetorical skills, is similarly diminishing. Odysseus pointedly avoids saying that Neoptolemus surpassed other warriors, as one would expect of Achilles’ son, but says instead that he did not yield and was not “second” to any (*Od.* 11.515). This rhetorical strategy of negating inferiority rather than emphasizing superiority undercuts Neoptolemus’ valor. Furthermore, Odysseus notes that those to whom Neoptolemus does not yield and is not inferior are his equals. The message to Achilles is that Neoptolemus does not surpass all the other warriors, as there are others like him—that his successor does not match the paradigm but lags behind his renowned father who *surpassed* others in strength and yielded to *no one* on the battlefield.

¹¹ Peleus was aware of this weakness of his son and sent Patroclus to counsel Achilles (*Il.* 11.788f). It is true that by taking a rôle in both counsel and the battlefield Neoptolemus might be the embodiment of the ideal prescribed by Peleus for the education of Achilles (*Il.* 9.443), but it was not the path Achilles followed or expected his son to pursue.

The rest of his praise of Neoptolemus' valor is militarily backhanded. Asserting that Neoptolemus killed many men, Odysseus follows up this buildup with an example that deflates it. Instead of naming the most courageous and formidable soldier from among those slain, as one would expect, he says ἀλλ' οἶον τὸν Τηλεφίδην κατενήρατο χαλκῷ, ἥρω' Ἐϋρύπυλον· πολλοὶ δ' ἄμφ' αὐτὸν ἑταῖροι Κήτειοι κτείνοντο γυναῖων εἵνεκα δῶρων. κείνον δὲ κάλλιστον ἴδον μετὰ Μέμνονα δῖον (*Od.* 11.519–22: "But *such* a warrior as the son of Telephus he killed with the sword, the hero Eurypylos. And many of his comrades, the Ceteians, were slain about him, for the sake of women's gifts. He was the most handsome man I saw next to the divine Memnon."). The relative pronoun *hoïon* leads the audience to expect the warrior to have exceptional qualities that would reflect on the prowess of the hero who killed him. But the expectation is dashed when Odysseus names, instead of a heroic feature, Eurypylos' *physical beauty*, which obviously reflects little on Neoptolemus' prowess.

Moreover, though emphasizing Eurypylos' superior beauty, Odysseus pointedly avoids any reference to his known heroic qualities. The Ceteians, led by Eurypylos, stood by the Trojan forces longer than any of their other allies, and Eurypylos' death was a factor in the Trojans' defeat. Other sources clearly testify to Eurypylos' valor. Apollodorus, for example, tells how Neoptolemus succeeded in subduing Eurypylos despite his excellence on the battlefield (*Epit.* 5.12).¹² Proclus' summary of the *Little Iliad* repeats Apollodorus' statement.¹³ Quintus of Smyrna, whose *Fall of Troy* fills the narrative gap between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, gives a lengthy description (8.128–220) of the battle between the two warriors, in which Eurypylos kills a multitude of enemies in his rush over the battlefield before he meets Neoptolemus. Casting the encounter in the form of the Iliadic clash between Glaucus and Diomedes, in which the warriors inquire about each other's lineage (*Il.* 6.119–211), Quintus has Eurypylos ask Neoptolemus for his lineage, charge

¹² τοῦτον ἀριστεύσαντα Νεοπτόλεμος ἀπέκτεινεν. For a discussion of the admissibility of later sources as possible paradigms for the Homeric Muse, see Ahl and Roisman (*supra* n.9) 1–26.

¹³ T. W. Allen, *Homeri Opera* V (Oxford 1946) 36ff: Εὐρύπυλος δὲ ὁ Τηλέφου ἐπίκουρος τοῖς Τρωσὶ παραγίνεται, καὶ ἀριστεύοντα αὐτὸν ἀποκτείνει Νεοπτόλεμος ("Eurypylos the son of Telephos was present as a help to the Trojans, and him Neoptolemus killed while he was excelling in battle").

at him, and threaten to slay him. The battle is ferocious, with the description focusing mainly on Eurypylos' efforts to strike Neoptolemus and on Neoptolemus withstanding the onrush with the help of Achilles' arms. Both Eurypylos and Neoptolemus are cast as formidable warriors, and Neoptolemus' heroism is yet further augmented as he subdues his dauntless hero. Dictys Cretensis' account (4.17) follows the tradition of presenting Eurypylos as an indomitable warrior. Dictys relates that Neoptolemus slew Eurypylos after he had caused great losses to the Achaeans, and that the Trojans put so much faith in Eurypylos that when he died they retreated immediately and fled to the wall. In failing to mention the martial qualities and achievements that the tradition recognizes in Eurypylos, Odysseus also diminishes the heroism that the tradition grants Neoptolemus for killing him. Moreover, the insult of omission is compounded by the insult of commission, for the tradition contains no mention of Eurypylos' beauty. This Odyssean invention shows his intent to diminish Neoptolemus' military prowess in order to demean his valiant father.

Odysseus brings Neoptolemus down yet another notch in his description of the heroes who hid in the wooden horse: he—not Neoptolemus—was the commander (*Od.* 11.524). He again refers to Neoptolemus' courage by negating indicators of cowardice rather than by any positive statement, saying that Neoptolemus did *not* turn pale with fear *nor* weep, but begged to be let out of the horse to fight the Trojans.

Neoptolemus thus emerges in Odysseus' account, first, as a better rhetorician than his father and, second, as a lesser warrior. He comes across as an *average* warrior, of whom there were plenty at Troy—a good warrior among many, but not the hero his father would have wanted. Although Odysseus claims that Achilles left him “joyful in that I said that his son was spectacular” (γηθοσύνη ὃ οἱ υἱὸν ἔφην ἀριδείκετον εἶναι, *Od.* 11.540), it is more likely that Achilles' spirit walked away without uttering a word, for although Odysseus' description leaves no doubt that Neoptolemus is a courageous young man, it does not confirm to Achilles that Neoptolemus is a leader, a *promos*.¹⁴ Moreover, in casting him as a better speaker than war-

¹⁴ I disagree with Heubeck, in A. Heubeck and A. Hoekstra, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey II* (Oxford 1989) ad 11.511–16: “Neoptolemus distinguishes himself as much by his counsel ... as by his performance in action. He was truly a πρόμος (cf. 493) who surpassed all [my italics]” (515). Neoptolemus clearly managed to stand up only to those that were in his league, so to speak.

rior, it doubly severs him from his renowned father, a great hero but a poor rhetorician. Without saying so directly, Odysseus' account suggests that Neoptolemus will not necessarily follow in his father's footsteps and, on the contrary, may be following in his own.

Sophocles, the most Homeric of the tragedians, uses and capitalizes on the Homericly documented aspiration of Achilles that his son follow in his footsteps and plays on a possible reversal in the *Philoctetes*.¹⁵

(b) *Odysseus Stealing Neoptolemus' Soul*. The play opens with Odysseus enlisting Neoptolemus' help in defrauding Philoctetes of Heracles' charmed bow, which never misses its mark. To get him to participate in this deception, Odysseus must entice him away from his Achillean heritage and make him his own son, so to speak, who will follow in his footsteps rather than in those of his biological father. In Freudian terms Odysseus seeks to assume the rôle model of moral authority and conscience a father usually provides for his son.¹⁶ The practical need converges with Odysseus' mythic rivalry with Achilles. The appropriation of Neoptolemus would in effect deprive Achilles of his only son, make Achilles figuratively barren, leaving no offspring, annihilate Achilles' *oikos*, and thus emasculate the greatest Achaean hero. To effect these aims, Odysseus proceeds with a combination of precept and example

¹⁵ For subtle transformations of Homeric models and material by Sophocles, see P. A. Easterling, "The Tragic Homer," *BICS* 31 (1984) 1–8. Easterling points out that, to enhance our understanding of the play, the audience need not have picked up in detail the echoes of Homer. For Homer as a general source of inspiration for Sophocles, see H. W. Miller, "ὁ φιλόμηρος Σοφοκλῆς and Eustathius," *CP* 41 (1946) 99–102. For some insightful comments on Homeric influence in the *Philoctetes* see S. Shucard, "Some Developments in Sophocles' Late Plays of Intrigue," *CJ* 69 (1973) 133–38. For the claim that Sophocles is molding the development of Neoptolemus on Homer's portrayal of Telemachus, see M. Whitby, "Telemachus Transformed? The Origins of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *GaR* 43 (1996) 31–42. The thesis is based on the assumption that both youths undergo some maturing experience in their encounter with the older generation of heroes: Telemachus in his quest for Odysseus and Philoctetes in his encounter with Odysseus and Philoctetes. Although the idea is attractive, we have more than two youths who have never met their fathers. There is little similarity between Telemachus' experiences in the courts of Nestor and Menelaus and the choice that Neoptolemus faces.

¹⁶ For further discussion of the modern ideological ramifications of Freud's theory, see J. Rutherford, *Men's Silences: Predicaments in Masculinity* (London 1992) 143–72.

focused on his instructions to Neoptolemus on how to “ensnare” (*ekklepseis*, 55) the soul of Philoctetes: τὴν Φιλοκτῆτου σε δεῖ ψυχὴν ὅπως λόγοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων (54f, “You have to steal away Philoctetes’ mind by just speaking words”). In this context, Odysseus directs Neoptolemus to create a bond with Philoctetes first by introducing himself as the son of Achilles, whom the older hero loved and admired, and then by telling Philoctetes how he, Odysseus, had deprived him, Neoptolemus, of his father’s arms. These statements involve a mixture of truth and half-truth. Neoptolemus is Achilles’ son, but the discrepancies between Odysseus’ account and that which Neoptolemus will soon render suggests that the scene Odysseus describes of the Greeks awarding him Achilles’ armor may never have taken place. Through this misleading mixture of truth and half-truth, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus he will be able to create a common bond with the older man that will enable him to steal or ensnare his soul. These are the precepts. In typically Odyssean fashion, they entail the use of verbal deception rather than either honest persuasion or direct force, the two methods of obtaining the bow that Neoptolemus suggests.

Precept is accompanied by example, which Odysseus provides as he sets out to ensnare Neoptolemus’ own soul. On a practical level, the ‘ensnarement’ is necessary because, as Achilles’ son and inheritor of his heroic legacy, Neoptolemus can be expected to reject a proposal that smacks of deception, which he initially does, and must himself be inveigled into it. On the level of the struggle for Achilles’ son, it is an expression of Odysseus’ desire for not only Neoptolemus’ assistance, but also his soul.

In accord with his own instruction, Odysseus too proceeds indirectly, using a number of different techniques. One is to get Neoptolemus to identify with him against Philoctetes, just as he would have Neoptolemus get Philoctetes to identify with him against himself, Odysseus. Thus, well before he even mentions Philoctetes’ bow, Odysseus carefully sets out to make Neoptolemus side with his mission against Philoctetes. He starts with what appears to be an innocuous enough request: that Neoptolemus help him locate Philoctetes’ cave and station guards on the road to warn of Philoctetes’ approach. To win his cooperation, he starts by telling Neoptolemus how he had marooned the injured Philoctetes on the island, justifying his deed with the claim that he was ordered to do so because the man’s cries at

their celebrations haunted the camp and brought bad luck. With this account, he puts himself in the right, establishes that Philoctetes is likely to be hostile to him and seek to harm him, enlists Neoptolemus' identification with his plight, and conveys his need for Neoptolemus' assistance in a way that would make refusal difficult. In other words, his apparent candor about his shabby treatment of Philoctetes and the enmity between them is designed to create a bond with the young man, while serving as a living illustration of the verbal cunning by which he would have Neoptolemus win Philoctetes' cooperation. The underlying motive of the account is to lay the groundwork for asking not only for Neoptolemus' specific assistance, which in this case does not compromise the young man and to which he readily accedes, but also for his total loyalty to what Odysseus presents as their joint purpose (50f).

Odysseus continues with his 'entrapment' by means of identification after he indicates the need for Philoctetes' bow to take Troy. At lines 70–76 he develops the theme of Philoctetes' enmity to explain why Neoptolemus, rather than he himself, must get the bow and, furthermore, why he must steal it rather than obtain it directly. Simply put, he tells the young man that if Philoctetes sees him, Odysseus, he will try to kill him as well as Neoptolemus, should he find out that the two are in league. Although Neoptolemus does not immediately fall into line but responds (lines 86–89) by rejecting treachery, Odysseus has begun to create an alliance between them on the basis of what he suggests is the threat that Philoctetes poses to each of them.

In creating this alliance against Philoctetes, Odysseus also has to undo any possible aversion that Neoptolemus might have towards him because he appropriated the arms of the dead Achilles. It is true that Proclus maintains that in the *Little Iliad* Odysseus handed Neoptolemus the arms when the youth came from Scyros.¹⁷ But, if that were the case, Neoptolemus would have had them, which he clearly does not. We are presented here with a new version of the judgment of the arms after Achilles' death, but it is much the same rendition that Sophocles gave in *Ajax*, in which Odysseus won them by trickery. It has no bearing on Sophocles' treatment in *Philoctetes* if the *Little Iliad* had Odysseus hand the armor over to

¹⁷ Allen (*supra* n.13) 29f: καὶ Νεοπτόλεμον Ὀδυσσεὺς ἐκ Σκύρου ἀγαγὼν τὰ ὄπλα δίδωσι τὰ τοῦ πατρός.

Neoptolemus at a later stage.¹⁸ In fact, the emphasis later in the play on Ajax as a foe of Odysseus and a friend to Philoctetes (410f) suggests that Sophocles does not work in this play against his own treatment of the judgment of the arms. If Sophocles had intended to eradicate the impression he and other tragedians created of Odysseus as a self-seeking trickster and turn him into a kind man who gives away things, one would have expected some statement to the effect that the armor is now in the hands of Neoptolemus.

Odysseus overcomes the obstacle by glibly attributing the injustice to the faceless "Greek army" (στράτευμ' Ἀχαιῶν, 59), without mentioning names, just in case word should leak out and Neoptolemus hear something about his rôle in the deliberations. (Sophocles' Ajax [*Aj.* 442–46] certainly did not put it beneath Odysseus to sway the decision). To place himself in the rôle of a father worthy of emulation, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus (to tell Philoctetes) that the army folk "did not think you worthy of Achilles' arms when you came and rightly asked for them" (62f, οὐκ ἠξίωσαν τῶν Ἀχειλλείων ὄπλων ἐλθόντι δοῦναι κυρίως αἰτουμένῳ). In this double-edged statement Odysseus both recognizes Neoptolemus' right to ask for Achilles' armor, as his son and heir, and suggests that he does not really deserve it.¹⁹ Through this statement, Odysseus not only puts Neoptolemus in his place as the lesser hero, but puts himself on a par with Achilles, as the only man deemed worthy of the great hero's armor, and thus by extension turns himself into the father figure the young man should emulate.

Then Odysseus instructs Neoptolemus to tell Philoctetes that Odysseus deprived him of his father's arms and to malign him (Odysseus) vociferously, creating the bond of a common enemy. In these instructions Odysseus exhibits the same unconcern with personal pride, fame, and honor, and of course truth, that he would teach Neoptolemus.

Odysseus' other technique is consistently to profess respect for the young man's heritage and the very values that he would

¹⁸ Apollodorus (*Epit.* 5.11) and Quintus Smyrneus (7.445), who have a tale similar to that allegedly in the *Little Iliad*, both postdate the fifth century B.C.E. But see Knox 191 n.30.

¹⁹ If indeed Sophocles followed the version of the *Little Iliad*, according to which Odysseus transferred the arms to Neoptolemus, such a comment would only have indicated Odysseus' reluctance to give the arms away.

have him abandon.²⁰ This rhetorical strategy also serves to dispel any hostility that might arise in the young man because of the known animosity between Achilles and himself, made all the more apparent by the clear opposition between their two codes of conduct. Thus, Odysseus repeatedly acknowledges Neoptolemus' heritage as the son of Achilles (e.g. 3f, 96) and refrains from direct attack on the Achillean ethos. Rather, he pays homage to Neoptolemus' inherent nobility: ἔξοιδα, παῖ, φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακά (79f, "I know, child, that *by nature* you are unfitted to utter such things or contrive evils"). And when Neoptolemus at first rejects his proposal and puts forth his own argument that the bow be obtained either through physical force or honest persuasion, Odysseus is careful to tell him that he is a son of a good man (ἔσθλοῦ πατρὸς παῖ, 96), and to point out that he too was idealistic in his youth (96–99).

Rather than fight the heroic values he would undermine, Odysseus appeals to them. The first appeal is to the value of devotion to duty, service, and dedication: Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, δεῖ σ' ἐφ' οἷς ἐλήλυθας γενναῖον εἶναι, μὴ μόνον τῷ σώματι, ἀλλ' ἦν τι καινόν, ὧν πρὶν οὐκ ἀκήκοας, κλύης, ὑπουργεῖν, ὡς ὑπέρτης πάρει (50–53, "Son of Achilles, in order to achieve the task for which you are here, you have to prove yourself noble not only in your *physical strength*, but when you hear something new which you have not heard before, you have still to render your service, since you are here as a servant").

This is followed by appeals to the values of loyalty (reluctance to cause the Greeks sorrow) and to the overriding importance of conquering Troy, for which his father had fought: εἰ δ' ἐργάση μὴ ταῦτα, λύπην πᾶσιν Ἀργείοις βαλεῖς. εἰ γὰρ τὰ τοῦδε τόξα μὴ ληφθήσεται, οὐκ ἔστι πέρσαι σοι τὸ Δαρδάνου πέδον (66–69, "If you do not do this, you will bring sorrow on all the Greeks. If this man's bow is not taken, you cannot sack the plain of Troy").

But the catch in the argument is that to attain the noble end for which he has come to Lemnos, physical prowess is not enough, and 'new' conduct more appropriate to the situation is required. In other words, while professing respect for the Achillean values, Odysseus essentially says that they are worth-

²⁰ This technique is consistent with the later Aristotelian argument (*Rh.* 1365b, *πιθανον τινί πιθανον*) that something is persuasive because it persuades the particular person.

less in the current situation. Moreover, Odysseus' assertion that Neoptolemus is in Lemnos as a 'servant' furthers the notion that the young man's duty under the circumstances is not to his biological father but to Odysseus, who sets himself up as a surrogate.

The appeal to the young man's Achillean values is followed by another appeal: an appeal to Neoptolemus' Achillean desire for personal fame. This is ultimately what overrides his Achillean aversion to verbal stratagems. The ambition for glory and the inclination to act rather than to speak are important elements in the Greek ideology of manhood. Yet, as we recall, deceit for the sake of the community is also commendable. The reward for this deceit, Odysseus assures Neoptolemus, will be the same reputation for justice that every hero wants: *τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ' αὖθις ἐκφανούμεθα. νῦν δ' εἰς ἀναιδὲς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ δός μοι σεαυτόν, κᾶτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν* (82–85, "Dare! and afterwards our justice will be apparent. Give yourself to me now shamelessly for just a brief hour of the day, and then you will have the name of the most pious of mortals for the rest of time").

More important in the Achillean value system than fame for justice and piety is fame for martial prowess. The ultimate prize that Odysseus holds out for Neoptolemus is thus the promise that he will be Troy's conqueror—but only if Philoctetes comes with his weapon (112–15):

Ne. κέρδος δ' ἐμοὶ τί τοῦτον ἐς Τροίαν μολεῖν;
 Od. αἰρεῖ τὰ τόξα ταῦτα τὴν Τροίαν μόνα.
 Ne. οὐκ ἄρ' ὁ πέρσων, ὡς ἐφάσκετ', εἴμ' ἐγώ;
 Od. οὔτ' ἂν σὺ κείνων χωρὶς οὔτ' ἐκεῖνα σοῦ.²¹

This finally leads Neoptolemus to say (116), "They must be my prey then, if this be so" and to agree to embrace Odysseus' deception.

In this ultimate enticement, Odysseus carefully avoids telling Neoptolemus that Philoctetes' presence will also be required in Troy, and mentions only the need for his bow. Neoptolemus gives up his moral heritage in the belief that he will be Troy's sole conqueror. In fact, as will soon emerge, he has been duped

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Ne. What gain to me if he should come to Troy?
 Od. His weapons, and his weapons alone can take Troy.
 Ne. So it is not I, as was said, who am to be the conqueror?
 Od. Neither you apart from them, nor they apart from you.

into giving up a great deal in return for far less than he had bargained for.

(c) *Odysseus' Watchful Eye*. Once Neoptolemus agrees to go along with his plan, Odysseus, as we shall see, can never trust him to stick to it. This is not necessarily because of anything Neoptolemus does. For one thing, Odysseus is suspicious by tradition, and Sophocles characterizes him much as the Homeric muse had. Sophocles is evidently sure enough of the audience's familiarity with Odysseus' character to build on it without referring to it explicitly. But beyond this, Odysseus has two very basic reasons for concern. One is that as Achilles' son, reluctant to use deceit, Neoptolemus is in constant danger of reverting to his inherited "nature," his *physis*. His mission brings him into contact with a wounded and betrayed hero with whom he is to form a bond based on shared heroic values and hatred of Odysseus and the stratagems he stands for. The question of how Neoptolemus' inherited nature will affect his feelings as he sees Philoctetes' misery is ever present. The audience is aware of the question. So is Odysseus. How long will he be able to sustain the deception? How much additional misery will he inflict on Philoctetes by taking his bow? The other reason is the problem of how someone who willingly agrees to engage in deception (as Neoptolemus had done) can be trusted to keep his word. Having put Neoptolemus in the position of having to betray either Philoctetes or himself, Odysseus must now guard against the young man's swinging in the wrong direction. For both reasons Odysseus keeps a watchful eye on Neoptolemus, first indirectly through the spy he sends and later in his own person.²²

Planning in advance, Odysseus informs Neoptolemus that he will send a spy if the mission takes too long (126–29): καὶ δεῦρ', εἰάν μοι τοῦ χρόνου δοκῆτε τι κατασχολάζειν, αὐθις ἐκπέμψω πάλιν τοῦτον τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα, ναυκλήρου τρόποις μορφήν δολώσας, ὡς ἂν ἀγνοία προσῆι ("And if you seem to tarry too long, I shall send this man back again having disguised his appearance in the fashion of a shipmaster, so that there maybe no recognition."). It is not clear whether he expects delay because of Philoctetes' resistance or Neoptolemus' faltering. His

²² The spy here and Heracles later in the play may both actually be Odysseus in disguise, but this paper is not the place to deal with this issue. For Odysseus disguised as Heracles see I. Errandonea, "Philoctetes," *Emerita* 23 (1955) 122–64, 24 (1956) 72–107; cf. R. Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (London 1964) 92 n.35; cf. 43ff.

phrasing, carefully oblique, leaves open whether the trader is to come to help Neoptolemus with a difficult task or as an enforcer to see that he carries out his mission. The statement can be understood as an act of collaboration or as a warning, lest Neoptolemus fail to carry out his instructions. Neoptolemus can interpret it as he wishes. In either case, Odysseus retains the paternal prerogative to oversee and intervene, and lets Neoptolemus know it.

The spy and his companion appear just after Neoptolemus has forsworn any return to Troy and all dealing with the Atreidae and other *κακοὶ ἄνδρες* (320f; cf. 455–58) and agreed to return Philoctetes to his home in Malis. More about Neoptolemus' behavior later. Here we may say that although Neoptolemus has not yet mentioned the bow, it is very difficult to know whether he has really had a change of heart or is simply going along with Philoctetes until an opportunity arises to obtain the weapon.

The spy-trader reports to Neoptolemus the Greeks' new plans to carry Philoctetes back with them by brute force if persuasion proves ineffective. The message seems directed at Neoptolemus even more than Philoctetes. The threat to bring him back by force would only make Philoctetes hide or attack with his never-erring bow. But the message is accompanied by information—not only Philoctetes' bow is needed in Troy but also his presence—that would give Neoptolemus more reason to fall into line. This information, given only to Neoptolemus out of earshot of Philoctetes, implies that if Neoptolemus does not act with greater alacrity, he will never be the great hero he longs to be. The threat seems to have the desired effect. For the first time in his conversation with Philoctetes, Neoptolemus refers obliquely to the bow, telling Philoctetes to hurry up and take “what matters most to him” from the cave (645f). The appropriation of the bow follows.

Odysseus appears in his own person when, once again, the situation is ambiguous and there is reason—if no certainty—to suspect that Neoptolemus may be about to defect. The audience has heard Philoctetes' heart-wrenching address to Neoptolemus, in which he makes it clear that without his bow, he will die of starvation. They have also heard Neoptolemus tell the Chorus that he feels *οἴκτος* (965, “compassion”) for Philoctetes—a new note, but, as Philoctetes points out, consistent with the young man's heritage as Achilles' son (971ff). The danger that he will revert to his inherited nature and return the

bow acquired by deception is reinforced by his apparent indecision, which is emphasized in his repetition of the confession, once to Philoctetes and once to the Chorus, that he does not know what to do (969, 974).²³

Odysseus emerges to prevent any miscarriage of his plan.²⁴ Peremptorily, he demands that Neoptolemus hand over the bow and, when Neoptolemus refuses, turns his anger against Philoctetes. At the end of that altercation, in which Neoptolemus does not participate, Odysseus returns to the ship to prepare to sail to Troy. As he departs, he orders Neoptolemus to come with him, much as one would drag a stubborn and intractable child away from a situation where he can cause trouble: *χώρει σύ· μὴ πρόσλευσσε, γενναῖός περ ὦν, ἡμῶν ὅπως μὴ τὴν τύχην διαφθερεῖς* (1068f, "You, go away! Do not look upon him, noble as you are, so that you will not corrupt our good fortune"). Odysseus' concern is that the inherently noble Neoptolemus will be moved by Philoctetes' misery, revert to his nature, and give back the hard-won weapon.

When the two return to the stage at the end of Philoctetes' *kommos* (1081–1217), Odysseus seems to be chasing the young miscreant, who has apparently decided to go back to shore for some reason: *οὐκ ἂν φράσειας ἦντιν' αὖ παλίντροπος κέλευθον ἔρπεις ὧδε σὺν σπουδῇ ταχύς* (1222f, "Won't you tell me what is this journey you are slinking back on with such energetic haste?"). This question implies both that Neoptolemus has not told Odysseus his motives for going back and that Odysseus suspects them.²⁵ His use of *ἔρπειν* ("crawling," "moving slowly") for Neoptolemus' way of walking from the harbor conveys the depth of his suspicion—a verb descriptive of reptiles, and also used by all the characters in the play for Philoctetes' slow, unshapely, and disfiguring gait, the result of a snake bite (207, 701, 730, 985). Philoctetes plays on the slowness implicit in the verb when he calls on the birds on which he had fed to approach him (1155, *herpete*), bravely implying that even if

²³ Knox (133) goes even further: at line 974 Neoptolemus must be in the very act of handing the bow to Philoctetes.

²⁴ Both here and at line 1293, Odysseus enters the stage from his hiding place behind the cave and not from the *eisodos* or *parodos*, as is customary: O. Taplin, "Significant Actions in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 27ff. This means that he is supervising Neoptolemus all the time. Cf. the eaves-dropping at *Soph. Aj.* 91ff.

²⁵ The text does not support the assumption that Odysseus' first words suggest "that the conversation began off stage," but see Taplin (*supra* n.24) 40.

they crawl, he is too crippled to harm them without the bow. Odysseus, however, combines the verb with two words of high energy and speed: *σπουδή* and *ταχύς*. This antithesis denotes swift, serpentine movement, the lightening speed of crawling and coiling. By describing Neoptolemus' movement in this way, Odysseus suggests that the youth is deviously planning to bite him, much as Chryse's snake had bitten Philoctetes. It is yet another statement of his personal distrust of the young man, of the risk inherent in the values he would teach him, and of the uncertainties attendant in the imposition of 'nurture' on 'nature'.

II. Nature and Nurture

(a) *Philoctetes' Fatherhood*. We have already indicated that Philoctetes plays the rôle of Odysseus' opponent, replacing Achilles of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In casting him in this rôle, Sophocles draws on the similarities between Philoctetes and Achilles known to the audience. As modern scholars have noted, the two heroes share a hearty dislike of Odysseus as trickster and liar, a natural aversion to the quick-speaking politician and a rejection of authorities who have acted badly by them (Knox 121).

The assumptions of Philoctetes' surrogate 'parenting' are very different from those of Odysseus. While Odysseus strives to replace Neoptolemus' inherited Achillean values with his own, Philoctetes constantly strives to reinforce them. Odysseus assumes that a person's 'nature' can be modified through learning, though the process may be difficult and require constant watching; and on this basis he assiduously tutors the young Neoptolemus through precept and example. His message is that Neoptolemus' Achillean values, though admirable, are out of place, and the values that he would teach will serve both the Greeks and the young man better. Philoctetes assumes that a person's 'nature' resides in his parentage and that the son of Achilles will conduct himself as Achilles had done or would have done. In the struggle between the two 'fathers', one can

discern clearly the nature *versus* nurture debate common in Sophocles' day.²⁶

Philoctetes, for example, establishes his belief in *physis* by repeatedly referring to Odysseus as the (illegitimate) son of Sisyphus rather than Laertes (e.g. 416f). He apparently follows the non-Homeric legend in which Sisyphus, who returned from the dead after deceiving Hades, is the archetypal trickster. But Philoctetes is doing more than calling Odysseus an inveterate liar by picking up a scandalous rumor that taints Odysseus' mother Anticleia. The underlying notion here is that one's hereditary characteristics—one's *physis*—cannot be cast aside. Even though Odysseus was brought up by the noble Laertes, in character, Philoctetes implies, he remains the son of Sisyphus. Philoctetes is also convinced that Neoptolemus is inherently good and noble: although lured by the son of Sisyphus, in the end his innate Achillean integrity and ethics will triumph. This conviction, along with his need for a friend, makes Philoctetes so easy a target for Neoptolemus' deceptions, both at the beginning, when he has no cause to know better and allows Neoptolemus to take his bow, and again after he learns of Neoptolemus' alliance with Odysseus. Indeed, in spite of some transient disappointment and trepidation,

²⁶ On the antithesis of *nomos* and *physis* as the "underlying organizational principle" of the play, see C. J. Fuqua, *The Thematic Structure of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (diss. Cornell University 1964) 55, 70, 215f; for a reading of *Philoctetes* as a dramatized anthropological treatise, see P. W. Rose, "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Teachings of the Sophists," *HSCP* 80 (1976) 49–105 (=ch. 5 of his *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth* [Ithaca 1992: hereafter 'Rose, *Sons*'] 273–327, esp. 278f). Rose studies the play in relation to the major sophistic views of human society, which he divides into three stages (*Sons* 274): (a) the origin of the human species and its struggle to survive, (b) the establishment of a social compact, and (c) the functioning of (primarily) Athenian social, economic, and educational mechanisms. He suggests that the conflict of values between which Neoptolemus is made to choose is explored within the framework of learning to survive in each of these three stages. The depiction of Lemnos as an isolated island and Philoctetes' struggle to survive there are representative of stage one. Stage two is represented in the relationship developing between the chorus and Neoptolemus, which attempts to undo the real and feigned bonds created between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes. The clash thus is between stage two and three and their respective representatives, as each of them attempts to lure Neoptolemus to his side. According to this study, Neoptolemus follows at the end the moral path of Philoctetes. The power of *physis* overcomes the sophistic *nomos*.

Philoctetes repeatedly places his faith in Neoptolemus' hereditary virtue.

Also in keeping with his belief that one's nature is fixed at birth, Philoctetes does not ask Neoptolemus to follow in his footsteps, does not attempt to teach him anything, and does not present himself as an example of any course of conduct.²⁷ Instead, he talks about the Achillean ethical standard and the virtues he expects the young Neoptolemus' hereditary goodness to exhibit (950). Thus he attributes Neoptolemus' perseverance despite the stench of his wound and his cries of agony, without abandoning him while he slept, to his "being noble by nature as by birth" (874ff); similarly, when he upbraids him for his theft of the bow, he calls Neoptolemus "the basest son of a noble father" (1284). Moreover, Philoctetes seems not to feel Odysseus' need to keep the upper hand. Not only does his own greater trustworthiness make him more trusting than the ever-suspicious Odysseus (and so less prone to supervise), but he also seems quite content to play second to his surrogate 'son', whom he does not need to mold or bring up, as Odysseus must try to do.

At the same time, Philoctetes also seems to reverse the father-son relationship and take on the son's rôle. For one thing, his repeated mention of his own father, Poeas, and his expectation that if only his father knew where he was, he would come and rescue him (492-99), suggest his longing for paternal succor. Against this background, Philoctetes' anxiety that Neoptolemus will leave the island without him and his pleas that he take him along (468-506) reverberate with the young child's fears of abandonment, even though they are founded on real threats in the here and now of Philoctetes' adult reality (751-57):

Νε. Τί δ' ἔστιν οὕτω νεοχμὸν ἐξαίφνης, ὅτου
 τοσήνδ' ἰυγὴν καὶ στόνον σαυτοῦ ποεῖ;
 Φι. οἶσθ', ὦ τέκνον. Νε. τί δ' ἔστιν· Φι. οἶσθ', ὦ παῖ. Νε. τί σοί;
 οὐκ οἶδα. Φι. Πῶς οὐκ οἶσθα; παππαπαπαπαῖ.
 Νε. δεινὸν γε τοῦπίσαγμα τοῦ νοσήματος.

²⁷ Scholarly discussion, however, inadvertently tends to portray him as a moral paradigm for the young Neoptolemus: e.g. M. W. Blundell, "The *Phusis* of Neoptolemus in Sophocles's *Philoctetes*" (*supra* n.5) and "The Moral Character of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 307; cf. *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (New York 1989) 193-220.

Φι. δεινὸν γὰρ οὐδὲ ῥητόν· ἄλλ' οἴκτιρέ με.
 Νε. τί δῆτα δράσω; Φι. μή με ταρβήσας προδῶς.²⁸

Of particular note is Sophocles' turning the untranslatable cry of agony *παπαῖ*, which Philoctetes exclaims four times in the throes of pain (785, 786, 792, 793), into *παπαπαπαπαῖ* (754), a play on the child's word for father, *πάππα*.

The rôle reversal may be considered in one of two ways. It can suggest Philoctetes' recognition of Neoptolemus' superiority to him, not only in physical power but also in status. Both Odysseus and Philoctetes are presented in the play as not quite on a par with Achilles. Odysseus' resort to guile to get Philoctetes' bow implies that he lacks the great warrior's ability to acquire it in more straightforward fashion. Moreover, unlike Achilles, who was a face-to-face fighter, Philoctetes and Odysseus are both bowmen.²⁹ Although Odysseus is not presented as a Bowman in the *Iliad*, in the *Odyssey* he uses a bow to subdue the suitors; and in *Philoctetes* he states his skill with the bow when he tells Philoctetes that as long as the Greeks have his bow, he, Philoctetes, is dispensable (1058f). The distinction is important: face-to-face fighters fought cleanly with nothing between them and their adversaries; bowmen fought from a distance, hiding behind trees and lurking in wait for their opponents. Because of the relative safety of their position, they were considered lesser warriors and less masculine than the face-to-face fighters. This is why Paris was viewed as a coward and among the reasons that Teucer was not considered Ajax's equal as a warrior. Philoctetes, less presumptuous than Odys-

²⁸ "Ne. What is this new thing that comes upon you suddenly that makes you moan and bewail yourself?

Ph. Don't you know, child? Ne. What is it? Ph. Don't you know, child?

Ne. No. What is happening to you? Ph. Surely you know!
 Παπαπαπαπαπαπαπαπαῖ!

Ne. The terrible burden of your sickness.

Ph. For it is terrible beyond words. But pity me.

Ne. What shall I do? Ph. Do not be afraid and leave me."

²⁹ Although P. Vidal-Naquet's proposition ("Le 'Philoctète' de Sophocles," in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, ed., *Myth et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* [Paris 1973] 178f) that Philoctetes is presented at the end of the play as both Bowman and hoplite is attractive, especially for the theory that sees him as the wild man integrated into the city, the assertion seems to have no basis in the text. For Achilles and Odysseus representing these two modes of warfare in the *Odyssey*, see A. T. Edwards, *Achilles in the Odyssey* (Königstein 1985) *passim*.

seus, may recognize his lesser status, and his readiness to reverse the father-son rôle may reflect that recognition.

Alternatively, the rôle reversal may be understood as the father's calling upon his son to perform his duty and take care of him in his infirmity—an expectation that is deeply ingrained in most pre-modern cultures. In the *Odyssey*, among the ways that Homer endows Achilles with stature is to show him as a caring son, who inquires of Odysseus about the esteem in which his aged, infirm father Peleus is held (*Od.* 11.494ff). For Hesiod, children's lack of respect for their aged parents signals deterioration into the Iron Age (*Op.* 185ff). At OC 1367ff Sophocles extols Antigone and Ismene for taking care of their old, blind father. In some treatments of the Oedipus story, Oedipus is said to have cursed his sons for not treating him well when he grew old and feeble (e.g. OC 1354–79; cf. 421–30; Eur. *Phoen.* 63–68, 1359; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.9; *Thebais* frs. 2–3, pp.112f Allen; *EOC* 1375).³⁰ Sophoclean Ajax makes sure that his parents will be comforted in their old age by his son Eurysaces (568ff). Though Philoctetes is still young enough to fight, his illness entitles him to the care of his foster son.

These two interpretations of the rôle reversal are not mutually exclusive. However understood, something of the difference in Odysseus' and Philoctetes' fathering styles is reflected in how they address Neoptolemus. All the play's characters address Neoptolemus as "child" (τέκνον, παῖ) or, more formally, as "seed of Achilles" (σπέρμ' Ἀχιλλέως). But Sophocles distinguishes the addresses of Odysseus and Philoctetes. Odysseus mostly uses "son of Achilles" (Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, 4, 50, 1237, 1298) and rarely τέκνον (130) or παῖ (372). Philoctetes, in contrast, never addresses Neoptolemus as Achilles' son, but uses παῖ or τέκνον fifty-two times, almost to the exclusion of any other mode of address.³¹ Their differing styles of address clearly distinguish the two 'fathers'. One might expect that Philoctetes, who recalls Neoptolemus to his heritage, would call him Achil-

³⁰ See also H. M. Roisman, "Oedipus' Curse in Aeschylus' *Septem*," *Eranos* 86 (1988) 77–84.

³¹ Cf. 236, 249, 260, 268, 276, 284, 300, 307, 315, 327, 337, 466, 468, 478, 484, 533, 578, 628, 635, 658, 662, 733, 742, 745 (*bis*), 747, 750, 753 (*bis*), 776, 782, 799, 804f, 807, 811, 869, 875, 878f, 889, 896, 898, 914, 932, 967, 981, 1295, 1301, 1310, 1367, 1399. Only once does he address Neoptolemus by the formal—and distancing—σπέρμ' Ἀχιλλέως (1066), when Neoptolemus has the bow and Odysseus has threatened to leave Philoctetes once again on the island by himself.

les' child or son. But in not doing so and relying instead on the simple *pai*, *teknon*, and other informal modes of address, he conveys the feeling of an older person's warmth, affection, and care for his junior, and his expectation that the younger man will return those emotions. It is consistent with his pleas for compassion and the personal connection he tries to form with Neoptolemus. Odysseus' repeated reference to Achilles' son is more impersonal and seems designed to flatter. It implies more respect both for Achilles and Neoptolemus than he has. Neoptolemus refers to himself as Achilles' son (240f) and quotes the Atreidae as doing so (364). Odysseus, in doing the same, apparently knows what Neoptolemus wants and gives it to him. His form of address is consistent with his mingled appeal throughout to Neoptolemus' desire for personal fame and honor and his sense of responsibility to the common Greek cause.

(b) *Neoptolemus as Odysseus' Son*. With two men calling for him to act as their 'son', how does Neoptolemus respond? Neoptolemus proves himself an apt learner under Odysseus' tutelage.³² Although he initially seems sure of his ethical stance and bristles at Odysseus' urging him to deceive Philoctetes, saying that guile goes against both his own and his father's principles, he is soon drawn into the behavior he purports to abhor—above all by his self-importance and an extravagant desire for fame. The truly valiant hero, he points out, takes no pleasure in victory gained by deception (86–95). But when he learns that without Philoctetes' weapons, he (Neoptolemus) will not be Troy's conqueror, he yields, embarking on the deception fully aware of what he is doing (113–20):

Οδ. αἰρεῖ τὰ τόξα ταῦτα τὴν Τροίαν μόνα.
 Νε. οὐκ ἄρ' ὁ πέρσων, ὡς ἐφάσκετ', εἴμ' ἐγώ;
 Οδ. οὔτ' ἂν σὺ κείνων χωρὶς οὔτ' ἐκεῖνα σοῦ.
 Νε. Θηρατέ' οὖν γίγνοιτ' ἂν, εὔπερ ᾧδ' ἔχει.
 Οδ. ὡς τοῦτό γ' ἔρξας δύο φέρει δωρήματα.
 Νε. ποίω; μαθῶν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἀρνοίμην τὸ δρᾶν.
 Οδ. σοφός τ' ἂν αὐτός κάγαθος κεκληῖ' ἅμα.
 Νε. ἴτω· πῶσῳ, πᾶσαν αἰσχύνην ἀφείς.³³

³² Psychoanalytic educators maintain that rôle learning involves knowledge, ability, and motivation: see R. E. GRINDER, *Adolescence*² (New York 1978: hereafter 'Grinder') 218f. Neoptolemus incorporates all three essentials and can easily act according to Odysseus' precepts.

³³ Od. His weapons, and his weapons alone can take Troy.
 Ne. So it is not I, as was said, who am to be the conqueror?
 Od. Nor you apart from them, nor they apart from you.

His desire for fame, accompanied by an overweening sense of self-importance, has been recognized as a central feature of Neoptolemus' personality. It can be seen again, for example, in Neoptolemus' first response to the Chorus' expression of pity for Philoctetes (191–200):

οὐδὲν τούτων θαυμαστὸν ἐμοί·
θεῖα γάρ, εἴπερ καγὼ τι φρονῶ,
καὶ τὰ παθήματα κείνα πρὸς αὐτόν
τῆς ὠμόφρονος Χρύσης ἐπέβη,
καὶ νῦν ἂ πονεῖ δίχα κηδεμόνων,
οὐκ ἔσθ' ὡς οὐ θεῶν του μελέτη
τοῦ μὴ πρότερον τόνδ' ἐπὶ Τροίᾳ
τεῖναι τὰ θεῶν ἀμάχητα βέλη,
πρὶν ὄδ' ἐξήκοι χρόνος, ᾧ λέγεται
χρῆναι σφ' ὑπὸ τῶνδε δαμῆναι.³⁴

He is sure that Philoctetes' affliction came to delay the fall of Troy till he, Neoptolemus, is mature enough to take part, as though the city could not be brought down without him.

Among other things, his ambition and conceit make him ready to adopt the guile that he initially rejects. In his treatment of Philoctetes, he applies the techniques in which Odysseus had instructed him. He soon proceeds to establish common ground with Philoctetes by mixing the truth that he is Achilles' son with the falsehood that he is sailing home to Scyros and with the half-falsehood, half-truth that he will abandon the Greek host at Troy because they defrauded him of his father's armor.

Ne. They must be my prey then, if this is so.
Od. As you do this you will win a double prize.
Ne. What? If I know I will not refuse the act.
Od. You will be called a wise man and a good.
Ne. Let it be! I shall do it casting aside all shame.

For a scholarly view of Neoptolemus less complimentary than usual, see W. M. CALDER III, "Sophoclean Apologia: *Philoctetes*," *GRBS* 12 (1971; hereafter 'Calder') 153–74; Cf. Rose, *Sons* 288–305.

³⁴ I do not see anything strange in this.
For this is a god's doing, if I have any understanding.
And these sufferings that are upon him
they have come from Chryse bitter of heart.
And what he is suffering now far away from anyone who cares,
it is impossible for this not to be according
to some god's design lest he should strain against Troy
the divine invincible bow before the
time arrives at which it is decreed
that Troy should be conquered by that bow.

Moreover, just as Odysseus had professed respect for his Achillean values, so too Neoptolemus professes respect for Philoctetes' values (453–58):

ἐγὼ μὲν, ὦ γένεθλον Οἰταίου πατρός,
τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη τηλόθεν τό τ' Ἴλιον
καὶ τοὺς Ἀτρεΐδας εἰσορῶν φυλάξομαι·
ὅπου θ' ὁ χεῖρων τάγαθοῦ μείζον σθένει
κάποφθίνει τὰ χρηστὰ χῶ δειλὸς κρατεῖ,
τούτους ἐγὼ τοὺς ἄνδρας οὐ στέρξω ποτέ.³⁵

But later he deprives Philoctetes of his bow by claiming he merely wants to touch it. To the extent that he does Odysseus' bidding, follows his instruction, and imitates his example, he apparently accepts his paternity. It may even be suggested that, for all his protestations of his Achillean ethic, Neoptolemus actually shows an affinity for Odysseus' deceptiveness. For example, untutored by Odysseus, he assures Philoctetes that he had never even heard his name before. The assurance comes smoothly in response to Philoctetes' question and indicates that Neoptolemus has no trouble telling a tale when necessary. Odysseus' instruction seems to have converged with his own natural abilities. At the same time, Neoptolemus is not the good son automatically following in his surrogate father's footsteps. His mixture of acceptance and rejection is epitomized in his account to Philoctetes of how Odysseus deprived him of his father's armor. Although the rough outlines of the story are Odysseus', the details are Neoptolemus' and show him in a rather ambivalent relationship with his would-be father surrogate.

For example, uninstructed by Odysseus, Neoptolemus adds a telling preface to the account (350–59):

μάλιστα μὲν δὴ τοῦ θανόντος ἡμέρω
ὅπως ἴδοιμ' ἄθαπτον· οὐ γὰρ εἰδόμην·
ἔπειτα μέντοι χῶ λόγος καλὸς προσῆν,
εἰ τὰπὶ Τροίᾳ πέργαμ' αἰρήσοιμ' ἰών.
ἦν δ' ἦμαρ ἤδη δεῦτερον πλέοντί μοι,
κάγῳ πικρὸν Σίγειον οὐρίῳ πλάτῃ

35

For my part, O son of a father from Oeta,
I shall take heed from now on to look
at Troy and the Atreidae both from afar.
And wherever the worse is more powerful than the good one,
and wherever the good withers, and the coward rules,
such men I shall never go along with.

κατηγόμην· καὶ μ' εὐθύς ἐν κύκλῳ στρατοῦ
ἐκβάντα πᾶς ἠσπάζετ', ὁμνόντες βλέπειν
τὸν οὐκέτ' ὄντα ζῶντ' Ἀχιλλέα πάλιν.
κείνους μὲν οὖν ἔκειτ'.³⁶

This preface contains information that Odysseus had not told Neoptolemus to give: (a) that his motive for going with Odysseus to Troy was his love for his dead father and the desire to see him before he was buried, and (b) the boast that the army recognized him as Achilles' son by his appearance.

These details, given on Neoptolemus' own initiative, serve two functions. In utilitarian fashion, they tighten the bond between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes through mutual love for Achilles, whom Philoctetes, a few lines earlier, had declared the man he most loved (242). But beyond this, they also point to the young man's genuine longing for a father. Neoptolemus' vaunted pride in resembling Achilles is particularly poignant—reversing the Hesiodic theme of the father proud of having a son who resembles him, and thus transferring to the son all the traditional weight of the father's feelings.³⁷ Moreover, the text implies that this recognition is Neoptolemus' invention. Notably, Philoctetes does not immediately recognize Neoptolemus as Achilles' son. This is something he should have been able to do had the two really looked alike, as he had spent several years with Achilles below the walls of Troy. His inability to do so now cannot be ascribed to the disabilities of illness and old age. Sophocles' Philoctetes is in full enough possession of his senses to recognize Neoptolemus and his company as Greeks by their

³⁶ Chiefly I was driven by the love for the dead man,
so I might see him before his burial, since I had never seen him before.
Then indeed the prophecy was flattering
that if I came I would sack the towers of Troy.
And on the second day of my sailing with
the help of a fair wind and broad oar I touched
upon the bitter Sigeum. As I was disembarking all the soldiers
surrounded me and greeted me. They swore that they
saw Achilles once again although he was no more.
And he indeed was lying there.

³⁷ Proclus' summary of one of the cyclic poems backs up the claim of resemblance, but similarly reverses it. Proclus says that Achilles resembled Neoptolemus: Ἀχιλλεὺς αὐτῷ φαντάζεται (Allen [*supra* n.13] 30f). No one allows Achilles to pride himself on his son resembling him; this underscores the point that he never saw the son he fathered.

garb alone (223f);³⁸ to note Neoptolemus' youth (237); and somewhat later, following the theft of his bow, a painful seizure, sleep, and mental turmoil, to identify Odysseus instantly by his voice alone (976, 1295). That he does not recognize Neoptolemus as Achilles' son suggests that the resemblance is something that Neoptolemus had invented out of his longing for his father.

Yet as much as Neoptolemus wants a father, the remainder of the account shows Neoptolemus rather ambivalent about Odysseus, who has tried to take on the rôle (362–81):

τά θ' ὄπλα ἀπήτουν τοῦ πατρὸς τά τ' ἄλλ' ὅσ' ἦν.
οἱ δ' εἶπον, οἴμοι, τλημονέστατον λόγον·
ὦ σπέρμ' Ἀχιλλέως, τᾶλλα μὲν πάρεστί σοι
πατρῶ' ἐλέσθαι, τῶν δ' ὄπλων κείνων ἀνήρ
ἄλλος κρατύνει νῦν, ὁ Λαέρτου γόνος.
κάγῳ δακρύσας εὐθύς ἐξανίσταμαι
ὀργῇ βαρεῖα, καὶ καταλήσας λέγω·
ὦ σχέτλι', ἢ τολμήσατ' ἀντ' ἐμοῦ τι
δοῦναι τὰ τεύχη τὰμά, πρὶν μαθεῖν ἐμοῦ;
ὁ δ' εἶπ' Ὀδυσσεύς, πλησίον γάρ ὢν κυρεῖ,
ναί, καί, δεδώκασ' ἐνδίκως οὔτοι τάδε·
ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτ' ἔσωσα κάκεινον παρών.
κάγῳ χολωθεὶς εὐθύς ἤρασσον κακοῖς
τοῖς πᾶσιν, οὐδὲν ἐνδεὲς ποιούμενος,
εἰ τὰμά κείνος ὄπλ' ἀφαιρήσοιτο με.
ὁ δ' ἐνθάδ' ἤκων, καίπερ οὐ δύσσοργος ὢν,
δηχθεὶς πρὸς ἄξηκουσεν ὧδ' ἡμείψατο·
οὐκ ἦσθ' ἴν' ἡμεῖς, ἀλλ' ἀπήσθ' ἴν' οὐ σ' ἔδει.
καὶ ταῦτ', ἐπειδὴ καὶ λέγεις θραυστομῶν,
οὐ μὴ ποτ' ἐς τὴν Σκύρον ἐκπλεύσῃς ἔχων.³⁹

³⁸ Recognition of Greeks by the special features of their garments became a *topos*. See Lucian *Ver. Hist.* 1.11, where the king of the Moonites recognizes Lucian and his company by their clothes. One wonders, though, if this is not a direct allusion to the *Philoctetes*, as in the ensuing description of the forces of Phaethon, who opposes Endymion, Lucian notes that those who are hit by the radishes thrown by the Sky-dancers in the Sun's infantry not only do not die immediately but have malodorous wounds (*Ver. Hist.* 1.16).

³⁹ And I demanded my father's weapons and whatever else was his. And they [the Atreidae] answered, the most shameless answer, I think: "Child of Achilles, all else that was your father's is yours to take, but another man is in possession of these weapons now, the son of Laertes." And I wept and immediately rose with heavy rage, and in great pain I say: "Oh you abominable man, how dare you give my armor to anyone but me, before asking me?" That other spoke, Odysseus, who happened to be close by, "Yes, boy, rightly they have given them to me."

The account presents Odysseus as the father figure for whom he is searching. In relating Odysseus' justification for keeping the armor, Neoptolemus casts him in the rôle of an upbraiding and punitive father and himself as a son punished for disrespect. He has Odysseus rebuke him for not being where he should have been when Achilles died—either on the battlefield with his father or attending to his funeral after his death, as a son was supposed to see to his father's burial (*e.g.* Eur. *Alc.* 662–65)—and of talking back to him, and he presents the withholding of the armor as a punishment for these offenses. He portrays an almost familial scene in which a son asks his father for something, answers in anger when he does not get it, but accepts his authority and does not fight him, even though there is a blatant disproportion between the offense—a rhetorical failure—and the consequence. There even seems a filial loyalty on Neoptolemus' part as he deliberately focuses on the Atreidae, who, he says, “shamelessly” informed him that Odysseus was in possession of Achilles' armor (363–70). He portrays them rather than Odysseus as the villains who first denied him the armor, even though this violates Odysseus' instructions to capitalize on Philoctetes' animosity towards himself.

On the other hand, Neoptolemus' account of the disposition of Achilles' arms has a rebellious quality. With characteristic vaunting, Odysseus had presented the award of the arms as the deserved outcome of a competition between him and his junior. Neoptolemus presents it as a request that Odysseus denied. When he arrived in Troy, as he tells it, he claimed his father's armor along with all his other possessions, only to find that Odysseus already had it and would not give it up. In Neoptolemus' version there was no competition. He was not unfit to inherit the arms, but was merely absent when his father died and was not present at the council where the fate of the arms was deliberated. The army did not decide against him, as Odysseus has it, but recognized and praised him. His version, framed to save his self-respect, counters Odysseus' aspersions

For I saved the arms and that man by being present close by.”
 And enraged, I immediately struck him with all possible abuse,
 making nothing incomplete, if he should rob me of my arms.
 And he having got to the same pitch, although not quick to anger,
 yet stung by what he heard, answered the following:
 “You were not where we were, you were away where you should not have
 been; and these arms, since you also speak with an overbold tongue,
 you will never have when you sail back to Scyros.”

on his valor and presents him as of no less a military might than the older hero. Thus Neoptolemus only partially accepts Odysseus' paternity. We see him longing for a father, seeing Odysseus as a father-figure, accepting him as a rôle model, and showing a certain respect for his paternal authority, and yet retaining his independence, insisting on his self-respect, and, finally, challenging the older man's status as the superior figure.⁴⁰

The discrepancies in the accounts raise the question of which, if either of them, is true. In my view, the text insinuates that none of it happened: there was no council or deliberation. Odysseus simply took and kept the arms; and Neoptolemus never asked for them and was never considered a contender. Both characters have invented scenarios that should have occurred but did not.⁴¹

The use of indirect speech in Neoptolemus' account hints at this. In recounting the episode, Neoptolemus meticulously quotes both Odysseus and the Atreidae, as well as his own address to the Atreidae. But he summarizes his reply to Odysseus in the most general terms: he merely says that he made insulting remarks. The clumsy summarizing sentence in indirect speech hardly looks forward to the conditional protasis with which it ends at verse 376.⁴² One wonders whether Neoptolemus ever said anything to Odysseus at all about the subject, or if the thought that he should have insulted Odysseus in a possible scene of this sort occurred to him only after Odysseus suggested the possibility. Neoptolemus' earlier claim in indirect speech that the soldiers recognized his resemblance to Achilles is similarly suspect—a wished-for occurrence rather than an

⁴⁰ The picture resonates with the ambivalence of adolescence: a continuing need for the father's guiding hand, coupled with the need for self-assertion and the drive to equal and ultimately surpass the father. Cf. Gringer 215–21.

⁴¹ Knox (128 with n.30) agrees that Neoptolemus is lying, but his view is based on the assumption that Neoptolemus possesses the armor, which Odysseus gave him on his arrival at Troy. For the problem of the choral corroboration of Neoptolemus' altercation with the Atreidae and Odysseus at 391–402 and for various views explaining the chorus' stance, see V. Bers, "The Perjured Chorus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Hermes* 109 (1981) 500–504; D. O'Higgins, "Narrators and Narrative in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles," *Ramus* 20 (1991) 50 n.19.

⁴² See also F. Ahl, *Sophocles' Oedipus* (Ithaca 1991) 209–11. From one standpoint, Neoptolemus puts his claim about Thersites being still alive in indirect speech because it is a lie: Achilles had already killed Thersites. See G. Huxley, "Thersites in Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 445," *GRBS* 8 (1967) 34.

actual one. Indeed, we cannot even know whether Neoptolemus had or had not been to Troy between the time of Achilles' death and the present encounter.⁴³ The use of a contrasting style of speech to cast doubt on the veracity of a character's words is consistent with Sophocles' well-known interest in breathing individual character into his personae through language, attested in Plutarch's reference to Sophocles' gradual discovery of diction that was the best and most intimate expression of character.⁴⁴

(c) *Neoptolemus as Philoctetes' Son*. Much as he had initially adopted Odysseus as his rôle model and substitute father, only to maintain a certain independence, so now Neoptolemus seems to adopt Philoctetes at various points, but never fully or decisively. Through a good part of their encounter, Neoptolemus appears to be as receptive to Philoctetes' fatherhood as he was to Odysseus' tutelage. Philoctetes' less authoritarian style of paternity may appeal to Neoptolemus' strivings for independence and mastery, as a youth on the verge of adulthood. From the beginning Neoptolemus is remarkably attuned to Philoctetes' need for a son who will take care of him. In his long introductory speech Philoctetes indicates, without saying so directly, the kind of son that he would like Neoptolemus to be. In graphic terms he relates his pain, the inconvenience of dragging his festering leg, his difficulties in procuring water and food, his primitive shelter, the misery of his isolation, and his need for succor. Indirectly, he casts Neoptolemus, the son of his beloved friend, into the rôle of the son who will rescue his sick father from pain and injustice. Indeed Philoctetes is searching for the healing properties that the audience might have remembered that Neoptolemus' father exhibited twice in the *Iliad*, in spite of his unrelenting anger. Much like Philoctetes, Priam appeals to Achilles' compassion and tenderness as a father would, when he approaches the hero to plead for the

⁴³ Neoptolemus as seen in the *Philoctetes* has not yet reached Troy: Calder 154–57; Hoppin (*supra* n.7) 15 n.29; for Neoptolemus as a naive, inexperienced youth not yet exposed to the ways of men, see E. Inoque, "Sight, Sound, and Rhetoric: *Philoctetes* 29ff," *AJP* 100 (1979) 220; for Neoptolemus as a developing character who only slowly recognizes and acts on his innate qualities: M. Ryzman, "Neoptolemus' Psychological Crisis and the Development of Physis in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Eranos* 89 (1991) 35–41.

⁴⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 79B: ὡς περ γὰρ ὁ Σοφοκλῆς ἔλεγε τὸν Αἰσχύλου διαπεπαιχῶς ὄγκον εἶτα τὸ πικρὸν καὶ κατὰ τεχνὸν τῆς αὐτοῦ κατασκευῆς τρίτον ἤδη τὸ τῆς λέξεως μεταβάλλειν εἶδος, ὅπερ ἠθικώτατόν ἐστι καὶ βέλτιστον.

return of Hector's body. The old king asks Achilles explicitly to think about his own father in Phthia while he ponders the request, and Achilles relents (*Il.* 24.486–551). Achilles' capacity for compassion is revealed also in his concern when he suspects Machaon has been wounded (*Il.* 11.596–617).

Neoptolemus appears to sense the type of filial relationship that Philoctetes is intimating, suggested by his brief statement that Nestor lost his flamboyance following the death of his son Antilochus on the field of Troy (424f). The statement reveals an understanding of the father's deep feeling for his son, which is consistent with Aristotle's observation (*Eth. Nic.* 1161b18–29) that the affection of parents for their children is deeper than that of children for their parents. The source of the understanding in so callow a youth, who never even saw his own father and who may not even have been in Troy to see Nestor's reaction, is difficult to locate. Possibly his deprivation heightened his imaginative grasp of the bond between father and son.

In any case, at various points in their encounter Neoptolemus seems ready to comply with the rôle that Philoctetes asks him to take. These points occur throughout, but are most salient at the three junctures where their conversations are cut off by the entrance of other figures—the merchant-spy, Odysseus, and Heracles—who rush in to keep Neoptolemus from succumbing to his sympathy for Philoctetes and ruining the scheme.

The first occurs when Neoptolemus accedes to Philoctetes' pleas to take him back to his home (524–29). After having forsworn any return to Troy and all dealings with the Atreidae and their ilk (453–60), he tells Philoctetes that he will sail home to Scyros and drop him off at Thessaly on the way. Whether and how he will do so when he is sailing on the same ship as Odysseus is never clearly resolved.⁴⁵ So the offer may well be one of Neoptolemus' stratagems. But he seems to have bonded with Philoctetes: he has not yet asked for the bow or even mentioned it; the Chorus, who feel that he is friendly enough to Philoctetes for them explicitly to support Philoctetes' pleas to be taken back home to Malis (507–18), seems to believe him; and Odysseus is worried enough to send his merchant-spy.

⁴⁵ It is difficult to agree with A. J. Podlecki, "The Power of the Word in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 239, that the scene with the merchant is "entirely unnecessary to the plot, for Philoctetes is already duped, but is a splendid *charade* which reinforces the lies which have gone before in a kind of *living lie*." The bow is not yet in view, and it is unclear how Neoptolemus is going to acquire it, or whether he is going to sail to Scyros or Troy.

The second juncture follows the long speech in which Philoctetes expounds on his suffering—this time about what he can expect to suffer, now that Neoptolemus has tricked him out of his bow. In this pained speech Philoctetes makes it clear that without the bow he will lose his ability to obtain food and will die; he draws a picture of the humiliation to which he would be subjected if he were forced back to Troy; and he bitterly accuses Neoptolemus of betrayal. Neoptolemus responds: "Some compassion, a terrible compassion came upon me for this man. And not first now, but for a long time I have been moved by this man" (965f). The danger of a turnabout is highlighted by Odysseus' sudden appearance to take the bow from Neoptolemus' evidently unreliable hands, and his reprimanding him for his pity: "You, go away! Do not look upon him, noble as you are, so that you will not corrupt our good fortune" (1068f).

The third occurrence comes after the failure of both cunning and force: Neoptolemus returns the bow and tries to persuade Philoctetes to return to Troy of his own free will by promising him healing and glory (1332ff, 1347). In this speech, Neoptolemus once again falls into the rôle of the dutiful son taking care of his father, though his caretaking is somewhat different than in the first two instances. In a way, Neoptolemus' attitude recalls Haemon's sound counsel to his father Creon to rescind Antigone's death verdict, claiming that his advice comes from caring for his father's good name among the citizens (*Soph. Ant.* 683–723). In a way, the speech reverses the traditional relationship between father and son, and there is a certain arrogance in the youth's preaching to his elder. At the same time, Neoptolemus' pragmatic and sensible counsel has the ring of maturity, and there is something to be said for a son's steering a rigid father to be more flexible. The advice stems in good measure from Neoptolemus' self-interest, as he needs Philoctetes in Troy if he is to become its conquering hero, but it may also be taken for what Neoptolemus claims it is: a means of promoting the crippled hero's own good as well. The idea that he is concerned with Philoctetes' plight is supported by his return to his former position when, after briefly wavering (1347–50), Philoctetes remains unconvinced. At this point, Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes that he will abandon the Greeks, sail home to Scyros, and take him home to Oeta on the way (1402). It is then that Heracles appears, much as the spy and Odysseus had earlier, to prevent a turn of events that would frustrate the capture of Troy.

Yet, following each apparent swing towards Philoctetes, Neoptolemus retracts his promise. After the first two, he reverts to accepting the authority of Odysseus, asserted first through the spy as intermediary and then in his own person. After the third, he accepts the authority of Heracles. After the visit of the merchant-spy, he asks for and obtains Philoctetes' bow. When Odysseus comes on the scene in his own person and sends him back to the ship, Neoptolemus obediently retreats. By Neoptolemus' third change of heart, it is indeed difficult to believe that this time he will stick to his promise to take Philoctetes back to Malis any more than he did the previous two times.⁴⁶ Even the ancient scholiast (*ad* 1402, *στείχουμεν*) did not believe it: *ἐπὶ τὴν πατρίδα· ἀπατᾷ δὲ καὶ θέλει ἄξει εἰς τὴν Τροίαν* ("To the fatherland; but he is deceiving him and wishes to take Troy").

On the other hand, the possibility that he did plan to go home and drop Philoctetes off on the way but was dissuaded by Heracles is not precluded. Nor is the possibility that he was thinking of taking Philoctetes back to Malis, then going on to try to conquer Troy on his own in order to get all the glory for himself—a possibility that may be implied in Heracles' emphasizing the mutual need (discussed below) of the two heroes for one another in the conquest of Troy (1433ff). Neoptolemus' real intentions cannot be ascertained from the text.

What is clear is that, just as in his relationship with Odysseus, so too in his relationship with Philoctetes, Neoptolemus demonstrates the same combination of an apparent readiness to be the good 'son' and a withholding of filial commitment. In both cases, his longing for a father is countered by the desire, natural to his age, to be his own person. In both cases, also natural in adolescence, his rejection of one father is accompanied and at times triggered by the pull of another 'father'.⁴⁷

In fact, much of Neoptolemus' behavior is typically adolescent: the alternation of the need for authority and guidance with demonstrations of independence, and the need to obey and be subordinate, which Odysseus' paternity allows, alternating with

⁴⁶ Calder (162–66) suggests that we see no change of heart in the repentance scene. He sees the following scene as a comic overplay, in which there is no doubt that Neoptolemus' goal is to get Philoctetes to sail to Troy of his own will.

⁴⁷ For the variety of sources upon which young people draw in their search for rôle models, see Grinder 218f; Rutherford (*supra* n.16) 153–58; cf. J. A. Doyle, *The Male Experience*² (Dubuque 1989) 216–34.

the need to act, to give, and to surpass the father, which Philoctetes' paternity allows. Neoptolemus' apparent wavering, trying out rôles, and rapid changes in emotion are all part and parcel of the process of maturation, of discovering who he is.⁴⁸ His immense sense of self-importance coupled with his lack of true self-confidence, as indicated by his susceptibility to persuasion by anyone approaching him with a direct argument, is a mark of his immaturity.⁴⁹

Wanting a father, Neoptolemus is drawn to whichever possibility he happens to be with at the time and is alternately susceptible to both their influences. He has the deviousness, cunning, power of improvisation, and rhetorical skill that make him a suitable son to Odysseus. He has the inclination to be straightforward and the desire to be respected that make him a suitable son to Philoctetes. When he is with Odysseus, he is concerned about the wrong he has done to Philoctetes (1224). When he is with Philoctetes, he is concerned about the opinion of the Greeks if he breaks his pledge to Odysseus (the Achaeans, 1404). With both, he looks for and holds on to an external anchor for his decision.⁵⁰ But alone neither Odysseus nor Philoctetes can assure Neoptolemus the fame he yearns for, although at various junctures they seem to. It is partly because of Neoptolemus' inability to choose between his two would-be parents that Sophocles brings in Heracles, the only *deus ex machina* in his extant plays.

⁴⁸ Cf. Gringer 23-147; J. Kott, *The Eating of the Gods, an Interpretation of Greek Tragedy* (New York 1973) 178: "Neoptolemus is a young man who is devoured by ambition and whose one unchanging trait is instability." Contrary to H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (London 1961) 299, and Vidal-Naquet (*supra* n.29) 161-84, there seems to be no transformation in Neoptolemus' persona, although transformation is needed for the theory maintaining that Philoctetes is an apt example for an ephebe going through the initiation to adulthood.

⁴⁹ This kind of volatility bordering on the lack of true self-confidence can account for what is usually seen as inconsistency later in the play when Philoctetes accuses Neoptolemus of breaking his oath to take him back to Malis, although Neoptolemus has never sworn to anything of the kind (941, 1367ff). Neoptolemus never rebuts this accusation. Sophocles leaves it to the spectator to account for Neoptolemus' silence. For possible explanations of this discrepancy, see O. Taplin, "The Mapping of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *BICS* 34 (1987) 71f.

⁵⁰ According to 'power' theories of identification, adolescents identify with the model who controls most of the resources that they covet. See Gringer 228ff.

III. Heracles

This *deus ex machina* has excited much scholarly discussion. Although many see it a crux of the play, there is no consensus as to what it means.⁵¹ Nor are critics of one mind as to how Heracles' easy victory, where all earlier efforts had produced such unequivocal failure, should be explained.⁵² Here, I would like to confine myself to the suggestion that, in addition to persuading Philoctetes to join the effort in Troy, Heracles comes to provide Neoptolemus with yet another 'father', who will bring together the contrasting values of Odysseus and Philoctetes with sufficient authority to make up Neoptolemus' mind for him.

Heracles has this message for Neoptolemus: καὶ σοὶ ταῦτ', Ἀχιλλέως τέκνον, παρήνεσ' οὔτε γὰρ σὺ τοῦδ' ἄτερ σθένεις ἐλεῖν τὸ Τροίας πεδίον οὔθ' οὔτος σέθεν. ἀλλ' ὡς λέοντε συννόμῳ φυλάσσετον οὔτος σὲ καὶ σὺ τόνδ' (1433–37).⁵³ In this

⁵¹ For Helenus' prophecy as a source of irony that culminates with the appearance of Heracles, see P. E. Easterling, "Philoctetes and Modern Criticism," *IlCISt* 3 (1978) 230–35. For D. B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *Philologus* 63 (1969) 52–56, Greek tragedians were absolutely free to introduce variant legends, and by stressing the plausibility of their chosen variant offered new insight into history. Thus Neoptolemus and Philoctetes' sailing to their prospective homes was utterly plausible to the Greek audience, and Sophocles meant to imply that the history as presented by the customary myth needed to be rewritten: "No man treated as Philoctetes had been could ever have swallowed his justified resentment and fought again for the Greeks" (53). Yet it seems significant that none of the surviving tragedies totally contradicts the mythical tradition. Indeed Sophocles made the above point of Philoctetes' justified ire without rewriting the known history, by bringing in a *deus ex machina*.

⁵² E.g. H. C. Avery, "Heracles, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus," *Hermes* 93 (1965) 281, 294, sees in Heracles' suffering his acceptance of unfairness and evil, which Philoctetes refuses. The difficulty lies in the assumption that Heracles succumbs willingly to his torment and is therefore qualified to suggest the same to Philoctetes. But he does not. Heracles has no choice once he has put Deianeira's gift robe over his shoulders. R. Hamilton, "Neoptolemus' Story in the *Philoctetes*," *AJP* 96 (1975) 136f, finds the bond between Heracles and Philoctetes in Philoctetes' suffering attack, which replays Heracles' before his burning. The bond is so clear that Heracles does not need in his speech to go into details in order to make Philoctetes see the parallel between them. The argument is alluring but builds too much on an allusion little emphasized in the play as it is.

⁵³ "And you too, son of Achilles, to you too I give the same counsels; for you are not strong enough to take Troy without this man, nor is he without you. But like two lions who share the same area, you, guard each other."

passage Heracles brings together the two types of warfare represented by Neoptolemus and Achilles on the one hand and by Philoctetes and Odysseus on the other. As noted above, Neoptolemus is the heavily armed soldier who, like his father, fights the brave and honest hand-to-hand, face-to-face fight. Philoctetes is an archer who shoots arrows from a relatively safe distance, where he lurks, less honestly, for his prey. Sacking Troy requires both tactics, Heracles tells Neoptolemus—a blend nicely symbolized in the stratagem of the Trojan horse, through which the heavily armed soldiers are introduced into the city where they wage a hand-to-hand battle.⁵⁴ Heracles' description of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes as lions who share the same feeding ground and guard each other simultaneously reinforces the statement that the two men need one another and underscores the need for both honest heroism and less lofty cunning in the mission at hand. Lions savagely attack their victims but only after ambushing their prey.

Heracles' message to Neoptolemus essentially reinforces Odysseus' ethos of guile and his end-justifies-the-means morality. This non-Achillean message obliterates the elitist distinction between the face-to-face fighter and the archer, putting Philoctetes on equal footing with Neoptolemus and, by implication, Odysseus—also an archer—on equal footing with Achilles. Moreover, it obliterates, at least in the specific circumstances, the moral hierarchy of the heroic ethos and the ethos of guile represented by the two would-be fathers.

In fact, throughout his short but decisive appearance, Heracles seems much closer to Odysseus than to Philoctetes and Achilles. His address to Philoctetes, immediately preceding and coloring that to Neoptolemus, resonates with Odysseus' address to Achilles in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, where Odysseus emphasizes Achilles' unfairness in withholding himself from the fight, the cost of his absence in Greek lives, and the gifts Agamemnon will shower on him if he agrees to rejoin the battle. But he virtually ignores Agamemnon's mistreatment of Achilles.⁵⁵ In similar vein, Heracles speaks to Philoctetes of his own suffering and the suffering that Philoctetes will have to endure for the sake of glory, promises him fame and a cure for his

⁵⁴ It is therefore difficult to accept Edwards' view (*supra* n.29: 63f) that Neoptolemus hiding within the Trojan horse indicates that Achilles' style of fighting seems to have been outmoded.

⁵⁵ Cf. H. Roisman, *Loyalty in Early Greek Epic and Tragedy* (Königstein 1984) 7–11.

illness, the honor of killing Paris, and the booty he can take home to his father if he fights at Troy. In short, he mentions virtually everything but the wrong done to Philoctetes by Odysseus and the Atreidae, who deserted him while he slept, ill and crippled on an unpopulated island, and gave him no more thought till they needed him and his bow to sack Troy. A similar tendency to ignore the matter of honor, so essential to Achilles and the Achillean hero, is also evident in Heracles' address to Neoptolemus, where he says nothing about the injury to his honor in having been deprived of his father's armor. His message to both is that, where there is a conflict, personal honor must yield to the needs of the common good.

Much scholarly discussion has been devoted to the question why Philoctetes accepts Heracles' argument even though it adds little to the twin promise of cure and glory that Neoptolemus had already offered in his unpersuasive speech.⁵⁶ The more relevant question is why Neoptolemus accepts it, *i.e.*, why does he accept Heracles' message of the need for guile when he did not fully accept it from Odysseus? Or, put differently, why does he accept Heracles' paternity when he had not been able to accept whole-heartedly the paternity of either Odysseus or Philoctetes?

The answer lies in who Heracles is and the kind of paternity he offers. On the most obvious level, Heracles' persuasive power inheres for Neoptolemus, as for Philoctetes, in the authority of his divinity in general and of his status as the emissary and son of Zeus in particular. As he tells Philoctetes in Neoptolemus' hearing (1415–18), "I have come leaving my heavenly home telling you Zeus' plans for you, to hold you back from the way you prepare." It is this authority that establishes the propriety of guile under the circumstances, which can

⁵⁶ The main difference usually suggested is that whereas Neoptolemus offers a cure by the Asclepiads, Heracles, as is proper to his status, offers a cure by Asclepius himself. See Knox 188f. C. Mauduit, "Les morts de Philoctète," *REG* 108 (1995) 368, notes that this substitution follows the traditional principle that an evil caused by a god can be allayed only by a divinity. S. J. Harrison, "Sophocles and the Cult of Philoctetes," *JHS* 109 (1989) 173ff, suggests that Heracles offers Philoctetes a hero-cult, or so at least the audience might understand Heracles' words, given Philoctetes' cults at Oeta, Lemnian Chryse, Makalloi in Brutium, and Magna Graecia. The spectators might indeed have been attuned to Philoctetes' cult, but the text lacks evidence of it. Sophocles is very careful not to allude to any possible notion of immortality awarded to Philoctetes. His fame will exist only during his life.

always be questioned when a mere mortal like Odysseus claims it, as in fact he does (989f).

Moreover, the availability of divine authority must be very appealing to Neoptolemus, who, as Philoctetes senses, craves clear authority despite his rebelliousness.⁵⁷ As he tells Odysseus, Neoptolemus "knows nothing but to do what he was bidden" (1010). Neoptolemus is not at all unlike the adolescents who reject their own parents in favor of some other parent or parent figure, sometimes a friend's parent, sometimes a teacher, sometimes a charismatic leader who calls, as Heracles does, for sacrifice in the name of a higher ideal. Here Neoptolemus rejects the human parenthood offered by Odysseus and Philoctetes, each of which is inevitably incomplete and flawed in its own way, each of which answers to only part of who he is, in favor of a more remote, more perfect, and more satisfying paternity.

Indeed, as much as Heracles echoes Odysseus, he also has clear affinities with the Achillean ethos as the god known for his unsurpassed strength and unflinching courage. In other words, he combines in his own person the qualities of both of Neoptolemus' would-be parents and integrates the conflicting ethos that they represent. Heracles' message is subtly different from Odysseus' and more balanced. In contrast to Odysseus' explicit statement of the need for guile—"I am telling you to take him by guile" (101)—Heracles' message is implicit, conveyed through his omission of all reference to the injuries done to Philoctetes and Neoptolemus. Heracles' implicit message avoids the disparagement of the heroic ideal inherent in Odysseus' utilitarian lip service to it, and so can incorporate both the need for craftiness and the need for straightforward heroism.

Heracles' appeal lies not only in that he is a god with compelling authority, but also in his ability to combine in his divine image the contradictory inheritances and the contradictory paternities offered by Philoctetes and Odysseus. The subtlety and complexity of his message distinguish it from Odysseus' similar claims and makes it acceptable to Neoptolemus, whereas neither Odysseus' nor Philoctetes' had been. For Heracles, guile is not a way of life, as it is for Odysseus, or a higher value

⁵⁷ For the emphasis on the theme of Heracles as the son of the almighty Zeus, see also G. M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca 1958) 427. Psychoanalysts believe that young people tend to cooperate with those who have power on their side: cf. Grinder 228ff.

than straightforward valor, but a temporary necessity to which the individual must submit for the good of the state.

IV. Conclusions

Sophocles treats the conflict between Odysseus and Philoctetes for Neoptolemus' soul within the contemporary concern about nature vs nurture (*physis vs nomos*). Contemporary debates questioned whether *sophrosyne* ("good judgment, discernment") can be taught and, if so, whether learned or inherited discernment is the stronger, and thus more genuine. The play raises these questions in reverse: to what extent can inborn qualities be relied on? can they be subverted? who is the 'real' father: the biological parent or the mentor who leads the individual to adapt his own code of ethics or way of life?

The play does not provide clear answers. Both spokesmen, Odysseus for nurture and Philoctetes for nature, assume that Neoptolemus' basic inclinations are much the same as Achilles'. For Odysseus this assumption is a source of concern, lest the young man revert to his *physis*; for Philoctetes it is the basis for both his initial trust and for his hope, even after Neoptolemus disappoints him, that he will in the end shake off Odysseus' influence.

Both would-be fathers, however, are mistaken. Neoptolemus does not really resemble Achilles very much at all, either in appearance or in virtue. His initial desire to use force against Philoctetes is not unusual for a young man, and he does not pursue the idea very persistently. Nor does he hold very long to the high principles he enunciates at the opening of the play.

In particular, his ambition for glory is quite different from his father's. The fundamental difference is encapsulated in the very speech where, acting the dutiful son and honorable man, he tries to persuade Philoctetes to forgive the Greeks their treachery and join them in their fight for Troy. This speech has numerous parallels to Ajax's address to Achilles at *Il.* 9.624-42, where he tries to persuade the hero to return to the battle against Troy after Agamemnon had appropriated his bride and prize of war. Achilles refused to forgive the offense to his honor (*τιμή*) that Agamemnon's act entailed. Nor was he tempted by Agamemnon's promise to return Briseis and give him sumptuous gifts. In this speech Neoptolemus tries to persuade Philoctetes to do what Achilles had steadfastly refused,

i.e., to forgive the wrong to his honor. In addition, he does so using much the same strategic plea that Ajax had employed in trying to sway Achilles back to the battlefield. Like Ajax, Neoptolemus too focuses on the good counsel he had given his hearer and on his outrage at the latter's refusal to accept it (more specifically, Ajax refers to the love [φιλότης] of his comrades for Achilles: *Il.* 9.630f; *Soph. Phil.* 1322).⁵⁸ Philoctetes, for his part, points out the incongruity of Neoptolemus' readiness to fight alongside Odysseus and the Atreidae after they had offended him (καθύβρισαν, 1364) by depriving him of Achilles' armor, which he calls his *geras* (1365), as Briseis was Achilles' prize of war.

The story itself is a dramatic parallel to the Homeric defrauding of Achilles (Knox 123). Achilles was able both to refuse the temptations and to restrain his righteous anger because he was not beset by the ambition for glory at all costs that possesses Neoptolemus. In a succinct statement, Achilles notes that he has two courses open to him: a short and glorious life, if he chooses to fight, and a long, uneventful, and unremembered life if he chooses to sail home—and that he can just as well choose one as the other (*Il.* 9.410–16):

For my mother, the goddess, silver-footed Thetis, tells me
that two-fold fates are carrying me toward the doom of death.
If I stay here and fight about the city of the Trojans, then my
return home is lost, but my fame will be imperishable.
But if I return home to my dear native land,
lost is then my glorious fame, but my life will be long,
and the doom of death will not come soon upon me.

Neoptolemus has none of this readiness to choose between glory and honor that Achilles possesses. Indeed, as Knox argues (138), his ambition for glory is the most consistent quality in his character. In fact, Heracles' assumption of his overriding desire to conquer Troy is the basis of his speech to him. On the other hand, as Odysseus knows, Neoptolemus has done nothing to display his father's valor in war. He did not sail to Troy of his own initiative but had to be fetched there. He did not come to retrieve his father's body. He did not ask for the armor. This is why Neoptolemus is such an opportune choice for Odysseus' scheme to dupe Philoctetes. He is the son of a heroic and principled man without his father's heroism and principles.

⁵⁸ Cf. Roisman (*supra* n.55) 14–19.

At a very basic level, Neoptolemus lacks his father's trustworthiness. It is not only that he has agreed to Odysseus' course of deceit. He cannot be trusted because in the play one can rarely, if ever, be certain of where his heart is. The ambiguity is especially apparent in the three turnabouts in his dialogue with Philoctetes. At all these junctures he seems to feel for Philoctetes genuinely and to play the maturing son dutifully, looking after the well-being of his sick and weakened father-figure. Yet he repeatedly admits to lying to Philoctetes (902f, 906, 908f). At all and any of these points, it is difficult, if not impossible, to know whether his concern for Philoctetes is an earnest reversion to his heritage, as Philoctetes repeatedly thinks (904f, 950, 971ff), or a ruse instrumental to his ambitions. The audience, whether ancient or modern, is in no better position than Philoctetes (or Odysseus, for that matter) to know when Neoptolemus is sincere and when he is not, or—to do justice to the intricacies of the play—to know just how sincerity and insincerity, compassion and ambition intermingle at any given point, what the admixture and relative weight of his motive is in any situation, whether he means, half-means, or does not mean any particular statement—and for how long.⁵⁹

These uncertainties are a comment on the fluid, multi-faceted nature of language and on the deficiency of the language-based ethos that Odysseus would have Neoptolemus adopt.⁶⁰ But they are also built into Neoptolemus' characterization. They are an indication of the still unformed state of his personality and, moreover, of an essentially unformed and thus unreliable core. Neoptolemus lacks not only his father's convictions, but also Achilles' capacity for friendship and loyalty, as demonstrated in the latter's friendship for Patroclus and his returning to the

⁵⁹ Failure to respond to Philoctetes' accusation that he is breaking his oath to take him back to Malis (941, 1367ff) is just another example of how unattuned Neoptolemus is to his father's principles. To Achilles such an accusation would have been an open assault on morality and drawn an instant reply. The moral implication of evasion of an oath does not seem to strike Neoptolemus in any way. Taplin (*supra* n.49: 76 n.23) reports that on an unpublished cup, Priam is being slaughtered at the altar of Zeus Herkeios (Zeus Keeper of Oaths): a suitable place for Neoptolemus' sacrilegious brutality manifested in his killing Priam.

⁶⁰ For Odysseus' attempts at educating the young Neoptolemus according to the sophistic terminology of survival (which represents the third stage of human development), and the failure of these attempts when pitted against the reality of Philoctetes' struggle to survive (which represents the first stage), see Rose, *Sons* 305–309.

Achaean ranks to avenge his death. Furthermore, his constant wavering is also an indication of his fundamental weakness. A change of mind in Sophoclean drama (as well as in Aeschylus' works) is usually presented as something imposed, and therefore a sign of weakness, something befitting a woman but not a man (*cf.* Aesch. *Pr.* 1003; Soph. *Aj.* 651f).⁶¹ In his weakness too Neoptolemus differs from his father. Neoptolemus' claim that he follows his father's ethical lead seems more a reflection of what he is expected to do than his own genuine inclination. Not having met his father, he knows that he has a prototype to live up to, but he has no way of knowing how. The separate bids that Odysseus and Philoctetes make for his soul, rather than his own wish, forces him to try and live up to the standards of the father he has never met.

Neoptolemus is a young man bereft of principles and models, a youth entirely given to ephemeral impressions, whose reactions are formed and molded on the spur of the moment without any solid underpinning. He succumbs to Odysseus' rhetoric and is then drawn by pity and some integrity to Philoctetes, and vice versa. This is why both Greek and Roman literary tradition could easily portray him as a man without conscience or remorse, bloodthirsty, haughty, and perverse in his joy over killing the aged, feeble Priam. Neoptolemus, significantly known also as Pyrrhus, is further portrayed as willingly executing Polyxena and the child Astyanax, whom, in one version, he snatches from the Andromache's bosom and throws against a wall and, in another, casts from a tower.⁶² Acknowledging his capacity for cruelty, Sophocles' play offers his cold-hearted

⁶¹ *Cf.* B. M. W. Knox, "Second Thoughts in Greek Tragedy," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 218f. Also, a change of mind is rare and "is either attributed to a secondary character or affects a secondary issue" (215). But Neoptolemus is not a mere deuteragonist, although Knox sees him as such (220). True, Philoctetes has almost twice as many verses as Neoptolemus, but this does not make Neoptolemus a lesser character. No one claims, for example, that the Nurse in Eur. *Hipp.* is the main character, although she has more lines than Phaedra and Hippolytus combined. The whole drama revolves upon Neoptolemus' efforts to persuade Philoctetes to join the battle against Troy. The inconsistency in Neoptolemus' character makes him a tragic hero possessing plausibility even according to Aristotle's renowned demand that an inconsistent character should be "consistently inconsistent" (*Poet.* 1454a26ff).

⁶² Further examples in Calder 168f.

assessment to Odysseus that it should not be too difficult to overpower a one-legged cripple (91f).⁶³

Achilles, for his part, is deprived of a real son and heir—and his manhood is diminished—rather by his never having been a father when he was alive than by anything Odysseus does to rob him of his son.⁶⁴ He has fathered a son, assured *prima facie* the continuation of his *oikos*. Yet, Neoptolemus is known in Greek tragedy to have been unable to produce an offspring with his Greek wife, Hermione, the daughter of Menelaus. His only son, Molossus, is from Andromache, Hector's wife. Molossus was almost murdered by the Atreidae, and only the intervention of his grandfather Peleus saved him. The Greek mythic arsenal of the classical age has Neoptolemus killed by Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, the former fiancé of Hermione. Thus in Greek myth either Odysseus tries figuratively to expropriate Neoptolemus from Achilles, or an Atreid deprives him of a son by murder. Achilles dies without leaving Greek posterity.

It is almost a commonplace in scholarly analysis of the *Philoctetes* to see the play, or at least part of it, as Sophocles' commentary on the political situation in contemporary Athens.⁶⁵ I do not wish to follow in great detail the possible immediate ramifications of such an analysis, for we can never be certain about the extent to which the playwright might have intended his characters to reflect the contemporary state of affairs. Nor do we know when the plot and its dramatic specifications were thought out and the interval between this process and the actual writing and presentation of the drama. But if we briefly return

⁶³ It does not seem necessary to assume that the ancients regarded cripples, especially men disabled after their birth, differently than we do. Philoctetes' disease does not fall entirely within the realm of disabled war veterans, but he was not born crippled either, in which case his disability would have had the connotation of an impending disaster on those who surround him. Nor can he be considered as a scapegoat on account of his deformity, because he can be cured. See D. Ogden, "Crooked Speech: The Genesis of the Spartan Rheta," *JHS* 114 (1994) 91–98; R. Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca 1995) 11–27.

⁶⁴ It is difficult to decide whether Sophocles foresees the modern claim against the traditionally absent fathers who abandon their children for the sake of furthering their careers, or simply dwells on the mythic factuality. For modern discussions of the phenomenon and bibliography, see e.g. Seidler 137–50; Doyle (*supra* n.47) 109; cf. T. F. Cohen, "What Do Fathers Provide? Reconstructing the Economic and Nurturant Dimensions of Men as Parents," in J. C. Hood, ed., *Men, Work and Family* (Newbury Park 1993) 1–22.

⁶⁵ E.g. Rose, *Sons* 327–30.

to Hesiod and remember that for Hesiod a son's similarity to his father was a mark of the golden age and that the converse marked the iron age, it is clear that in Sophocles' view the Athens of his day is in the iron age. Neoptolemus falls short of the ethical standards of his father, and Odysseus can hardly be seen as following the example of the noble Laertes. Assigning Sisyphus as a father to Odysseus is an easy way out of an untoward situation, in which society cannot predict the behavior of its most prominent citizens. The assumption that sons follow the footsteps of their father is a convenient crutch of stability for a society in difficulty. One would like to predict the conduct and morals of one's fellow men. *Philoctetes* does not present such a prospect for Sophocles' times.

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