

INFECTION IN THE SENTENCE: THE DISCOURSE OF DISEASE IN SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES*

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Infection in the sentence breeds
We may inhale Despair
At distances of Centuries
From the Malaria—
Emily Dickinson

A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death . . . I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live.

Julia Kristeva

The *Philoctetes* is a notoriously elusive drama, much studied but often poorly understood. Sophocles' reputation as a staunch upholder of aristocratic values tends to determine which aspects of the play receive attention: disruptive elements in the Sophoclean hero's character, for example, are often assessed as incidental to his dilemma, rather than as central to his narrative and thus to his character type.¹ Penelope Biggs is still virtually

1 See, e.g., Bowra 1944; Reinhardt 1947; Jameson 1956; Whitman 1951; Kirkwood 1958; Kitto 1958; Avery 1965; Podlecki 1966; Segal 1981; Knox 1982; Blundell 1988, 1989; Rose 1992. Rose provides a succinct discussion of the more famous division of critical camps into "hero worshippers" versus "pietists" that Winnington-Ingram 1980 tried to resolve.

alone in her detailing of how Sophocles employs the imagery of disease to highlight the isolation and inner conflict of such heroes as Ajax, Heracles, and Philoctetes,² as is David Seale in focusing on the visual impact of these characters.³ I want to emphasize here that, in the case of Philoctetes, the deeply conflicted nature of the Sophoclean hero takes a particularly visceral form. Philoctetes' diseased body, fluctuating emotional states, and tenuous hold on verbal control—which arouse troubled, often ambivalent reactions in Neoptolemus and the chorus—serve to highlight the hero's outsider status with a singular mix of physical deformity and mental distress. The infection from his wounded foot is both the external mark of and the catalyst for his mental disruption and isolation, which, in turn, lend his speech a volatile quality that further sets him apart from his interlocutors. Not merely pitiful and possessed of a heroic virtue that far outstrips that of Odysseus, Philoctetes is also a disturbing and fearsome figure. He is marooned on Lemnos, an island known elsewhere in myth for its evil-smelling, murderous women,⁴ his wound is repulsive in its dripping stench, and his speech often shudders disturbingly between heroic lament and bestial howls. At certain points in the drama, the hero's voice even seems infected by a verbal leakage from his wound to his words, which then affects attempts by others to describe his affliction.

While I am not arguing that Sophocles' depiction of Philoctetes' character centers only on this disruptive element, I do think that calling attention to it helps rather than harms an understanding of the depth of his heroic isolation. The distance between his perspective and that of the army, as represented by the crafty Odysseus, is such that it cannot be bridged on the human level; only the intervention of Heracles prevents the complete dissolution of Odysseus' plot to bring Philoctetes and his bow back to Troy and thereby assure Greek victory. Philoctetes' physical affliction has led to and then maintained his mental isolation, reinforcing his commitment to a heroic code of values that prohibits any *détente* with an army that had

2 Biggs 1966. More recently Segal 1995:97–98, 113 has discussed how the external manifestations of Philoctetes' isolation (such as the wound and the barren island Lemnos) reflect his inner isolation from both gods and humans.

3 Seale 1982; but see also Stephens 1995. Segal 1980 does discuss the visual impact of significant objects identified with these heroes, but treats this impact as largely symbolic rather than importantly concrete.

4 Herod. *Hist.* 6.138, Apollon. *Argon.* 1.588, Apollod. *Bib.* 1.9.17.

rejected him.⁵ This study focuses on the imagery in Sophocles' drama that links Philoctetes' mental isolation to his physical distress and argues that language constitutes the primary site in which the effects of this isolation are detailed. Two intersecting sets of associations trace the pattern of Philoctetes' affliction: 1) the internal impact on him of the serpent's infection, described by metaphors that relate the voracious, noisy capacity of the bestial mouth to somatic effect; and 2) the ways in which verbal communication is involved in both the eruption of the disease and its control. These topics are most central to the discussion, while other related connections between disease and the environment (both physical and political) fill in some crucial interstices between the body's invasion and the use of language.

As a means of illuminating the symbolic patterns that Sophocles employs in his portrayal of Philoctetes, I draw on the imagery of the semiotician and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (and to a lesser extent that of Freud). Shoshana Felman and others have argued for a use of psychoanalysis in literary study that focuses on the literariness of psychoanalytic discourse.⁶ Highlighting its choice of metaphor, imagery, and rhetorical structures, Felman formulates a poetics that treats the language of psychoanalytic texts as "implicated" in literature (and vice versa), rather than as providing the methodology for its interpretation. This kind of analysis is not concerned with whether Freudian theory (or Lacanian theory, etc.) is true in a scientific sense; instead, it examines the power of the symbolic systems employed in psychoanalysis and literature to enlighten and inform each other. While the literature focused on in this approach is usually from the modern era, I suggest that exploring the interimplications of certain tragedies and psychoanalytic studies can be equally revealing.

Both psychoanalytic theory and ancient tragedy are narratives that have similar statuses as authoritative investigations of human emotion and motivation. Their different discourses often employ related metaphors and associative patterns to address behavioral issues, and the figurative language of psychoanalytic theorists repeatedly makes use of the semiotic systems of ancient texts. Certain important theories of Freud and Kristeva, for example,

5 In analyzing Aeschylus' version of the story, Dio Chrysostom argues that Philoctetes' long, isolated suffering so affects his outlook that it even accounts for his failure to recognize Odysseus, since the latter seems to be using only words to hide his identity (*Or.* 59.5–6); see Olson 1991.271–72.

6 Felman 1982; for a more recent example of the approach, see Chisholm 1992.

show a use of metaphors associating sociological and physiological phenomena that parallels that in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. The drama's semiotic patterning links morality and community to disease and its cure, foregrounding language as the central mediating element among these realms. Thus, although the ancient poet regards malignant influences on human physiology and behavior as concrete and external in origin (while the modern writers tend to attribute the origin of disturbance to internalized sociocultural forces), the figurative language of both engages related sets of associations and treats language itself as their meeting ground. If Freud's metaphors are often overtly scientific or sociological in origin, he is also a consummate storyteller: his vocabulary and plotting feels as visceral, taut, and compelling as any haunting narrative. Freud's figurative language has been enriched and transformed by the addition of more sophisticated linguistic and literary frameworks, especially in the work of Kristeva, whose theory of abjection I introduce below. Psychoanalytic descriptions of behavioral phenomena may frequently seem transparent (i.e., non-metaphorical) to the modern eye, but Kristeva's work, in particular, is unapologetically poetic and metaphorical, seeming even to encourage the exploration of how her imagery intersects with that of ancient tragedy.⁷

In the *Philoctetes*, language serves as the site of conflict between health and disease, normal and "strange," and perhaps even human and animal. Anthony Podlecki termed the *Philoctetes* "a case-study in the failure of communication" and catalogued the references to speech in the play.⁸ Biggs noted that repetition of the word for disease, *nosos*, and its derivatives—especially in association with the foot—"pervades all the characters' turns of speech,"⁹ but she did not associate this phenomenon with the breakdown of communication or the inhibition of speech. In what follows, I link these two themes, discussing how images of disease color the language of the play, how conversation—a curative kind of discourse—may temper the infected man's harsh voice and even lead to his physical health, and, finally, how both disease and deceit contribute to impeding Philoctetes' effective use of language and his corollary role in the play's schema.

7 In Kristeva 1980, she herself describes a kind of intertextuality—what she calls "a permutation of texts"—that highlights the hybrid and interwoven character of her own writing.

8 Podlecki 1966.233, 246–50.

9 Biggs 1966.31 and n. 4. Biggs lists 24 uses of *nosos*, 6 regarding the figurative use of the footstep, and 21 referring to or suggesting lameness.

Odysseus trains Neoptolemus in a kind of verbal theft, which seeks to isolate and entrap Philoctetes by verbally mirroring his character type and so gaining his sympathy. The clear oppositions among the characters disintegrate as the play unfolds, due, in part, to the confluence of Odysseus' deceit and Philoctetes' disease, both of which inhibit Philoctetes' access to calm verbal exchange. Moreover, Philoctetes' volatile language involves Neoptolemus, in particular, in a troubling apprehension of self in repulsive and wretched other. And Philoctetes' own split between heroic self and internalized beast arouses a similar splitting of will in both Neoptolemus and the chorus, who struggle with feelings of pity and identification. Philoctetes' visible anguish and volatile speech are simultaneously upsetting and mesmerizing, as his gruesome appearance attracts and holds the horrified gaze of those who seek to control him.

Meanwhile, Philoctetes is caught for most of the play in Odysseus' entrapping plot: snared like the animals he hunts and with which he associates himself. The roughened outcast responds to his entrapment, in part, with a persuasive narrative of his painful state and a proud self-pity; later, when threatened by Odysseus, he enters into contrapuntal lamentation with the chorus, a verbal role reserved especially for grieving heroes (both male and female) in Sophocles and for female outcasts in Euripides.¹⁰ But Philoctetes is also a howling, disruptive presence due to the serpent's bite, uttering cries that exceed meaning—a loss of language shared especially with his patron Heracles in the *Trachiniae*.¹¹ The internalization of the bestial or monstrous signals a move from the representation in archaic art

10 In Sophocles, cf. *Electra* and to a lesser degree *Antigone* (who has one stasimon with a hostile chorus: *Ant.* 781–882), *Ajax* (one stasimon with the chorus: *Aj.* 348–427), *Oedipus* (one brief stasimon with the chorus: *OT* 1313–65), *Heracles* (one brief stasimon with the Presbus: *Trach.* 1003–43). In Euripides, *Electra*, *Helen* (*Hel.*), *Medea*, and *Hecuba* (*Tro.*), especially, have extended interactions with the chorus; *Creusa*, *Hippolytus*, and *Amphitryon* (as a kind of proxy for his son in *HF*) have more situational interactions with them. Only Philoctetes mourns throughout the play; *Electra*, *Antigone*, and *Ajax* each sing a long stasimon (100 lines or more) with the chorus. Male characters sing only rarely in Euripides, often in religious settings (*Ion* [*Ion*], *Dionysus* [*Bacch.*]). Whitman 1951.172–73 compares the characters of Sophocles' *Electra* and Philoctetes, commenting on their shared status as outcasts, their insistent suffering, and their divine archetypes (*Niobe* and *Heracles*, respectively).

11 *Ajax*, *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and *Electra* use standard tuneful cries like *ιὸ, αἰαῖ, φεῦ*, etc.; *Heracles* and *Philoctetes* use sounds whose semantics and metrics are even less determined than these: *ἔ ἔ* (*Trach.* 1004, 1014); *ᾶ ᾶ ᾶ ᾶ*, *παππαπαπαπᾶ*, etc. (*Phil.* 732, 739, 746, 754). Although the mourning context does determine the general impact of these cries, their sounds are less formally molded.

and poetry of “real” monsters—physically hybrid creatures who are often combinations of animal and human features—to a focus in tragedy on the internalization of such wild creatures, which results in what might be termed monstrous deformations of character. Figures like Philoctetes are sometimes anomalous only on this non-physical level: in mentality, role definition, or intimate setting (cf. Ajax, Medea). Or this transformation (the internalization of the monstrous element) may result from physical contact with the toxic beast, which can in turn lead to a mental transformation. In the *Trachiniae*, Deianira unknowingly coats Heracles’ cloak with the Hydra’s venom, which then sinks into his skin upon contact and fatally alters at least his body and perhaps also his character. Philoctetes was actually bitten; the serpent’s poison entered his body, affecting his temperament through the pain and frenzy it brought on.¹² Tragic characters who come into contact with this monstrous element often become marked by physical excretion: froth at the mouth, excrescent diseases, or dripping gore.¹³

A few readers of these plays have argued that the diseases that beset heroes such as Philoctetes, Ajax, and Heracles match in symbolic form their personalities, so that the medical origin of their distress is coupled with a metaphysical one. Biggs emphasizes that the “great soul” (cf. *μεγάλων ψυχῶν*, 154) of Ajax is depicted as “a pathologically swollen body.”¹⁴ Similarly, Philoctetes’ dripping wound is a physiological condition that, as some scholars have noted, is analogized in the play to the condition of his soul.¹⁵ And, like these other dramas, the *Philoctetes* extends the vocabulary of health and disease to encompass both emotional states and moral stances. But, unlike the afflictions of Ajax and Heracles, Philoctetes’ disease is emphatically concrete. His bodily conditions are foregrounded; Sophocles

12 Biggs 1966.223, Segal 1995.98. See also Padel 1995 for the language of madness in Greek texts. In the modern era, the connection between somatic symptom and psychic “disorder” is understood as working from the inside out, although the origin of mental distress may still be located in the subject’s environment. If Sophoclean tragedy assesses the body as an indicator of inner disturbance, so do Freud’s 1965a.96–97 descriptions of psychopathology. Freud argues that, in neurotics, psychological disorders may often be detected by physical symptoms (the former giving rise to the latter).

13 Besides Philoctetes’ dripping sore and the skin disease of Heracles in the *Trach.*, we might compare Orestes in the *Or.* and Heracles in the *HF*, who froth in their madness. Orestes’ hands are also bloody, while Oedipus, in extreme mental distress, turns his eyes into bloody holes. A more formidable female like Medea, in some contrast, is an agent rather than a victim of such excrescence (cf. the poisoned cloak that she gives to Creusa).

14 Biggs 1966.226.

15 Biggs 1966.223, 232; Segal 1995.98.

insists on the specific physical details of the hero's condition. Philoctetes' mental agonies are responses to the physical pain the disease brings and the isolated living conditions it necessitated, conditions that only exacerbate his heroic tendencies toward emotional remove. While Ajax's physical bulk looms behind expressions indicating mental distention in that play (e.g., *Aj.* 41, 154), Philoctetes' bitter states of mind are cast in physical terms.¹⁶

In Greek poetry from Homer on, the agents of madness and disease are animate, invaders from outside that nevertheless respond to what is already within the human body (some fault, transgression, or vulnerability). The diseased and the mad are part "daemonic bestiality," part recognizable human form, and thus grotesque because they are hybrids: half-way between one state and another, they elude fixed categorization.¹⁷ Even the terms used to denote this borderline status are problematic. The literary critic Geoffrey Harpham calls the grotesque a "species of confusion," and suggests that there is something in the nature of this quality that confounds linguistic categorization: "the word itself is a storage-place for the outcasts of language, entities for which there is no appropriate noun; and this accords with the sense of formal disorder we perceive in grotesqueries, in which ontological, generic, or logical categories are illegitimately jumbled together."¹⁸ Odysseus and other characters in the *Philoctetes* refer to the wounded man and his voice as *agrios* and *deinos*, words that denote a comparably fearsome lack of "normal" attributes. It is not merely that such labels as "wild" and "strange" do not specify precise qualities; this could be argued of many overused adjectives. Instead, *deinos*, in particular, signals the collision of concepts; its very purpose is to indicate that which obscures definition through an excess of meaning. Similarly, the word "grotesque," Harpham argues, "represent[s] a condition of overcrowding or contradiction in the place where the modifier should be."¹⁹ In Sophocles' play, the term

16 Although Wilson 1941 perhaps overplayed Sophocles' association with the Hippocratic writers in his famous study, the *Phil.*, in particular, does seem to offer evidence of the poet's familiarity with contemporary medical theory and his understanding of its relevance to the dramatic themes he was developing.

17 Padel 1995.142.

18 Harpham 1982.xxi.

19 Harpham 1982.3. In demarcating this illogical, contradictory collapse of categories, such words call to mind the id's compulsive inclusivity as Freud 1965b.65 describes it: "The logical laws of thought do not apply to the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction. Contrary impulses exist side by side, without canceling each other out or diminishing each other."

deinos indicates both the fearsome and the strikingly poignant qualities of the hero, his disease, and the emotions he arouses in others. The same word is used of the physically monstrous figures in Hesiod's *Theogony*, but there and elsewhere *deinos* is so singularly amorphous and contradictory in meaning²⁰ that it seems to support Harpham's notion that such words themselves designate what lies "just outside of focus, just beyond the reach of language."²¹

Coincident with this problem of definition is the cluster of images that merges human with animal and infection with uses of the mouth: both the emission of sounds (including words) and ingestion (especially a vampiric devouring). These images surface repeatedly throughout the *Philoctetes*, most emphatically binding somatic symptom to mental effect and both to an eruptive speech type. This symbolic lexicon initially distinguishes the verbal control of the largely absent Odysseus from the wild babble of Philoctetes, whose physical body and its signature excrescence continuously haunt the play's setting. Odysseus introduces the premises for action, sets up that action, and then uses others to disguise his presence on the island until his direct intervention is again necessary. Neoptolemus, a member of Odysseus' crew disguised as a merchant, and even the chorus serve as Odysseus' proxies, seeking to deceive Philoctetes regarding their intentions to take him back to Troy.²² Odysseus uses these proxies to persuade the wounded man to board the ship with the bow that the oracle has indicated will, in the hands of its owner, conquer Troy. When Philoctetes' emotional heroism clashes too sharply with the political pragmatism in which Neoptolemus has been quickly trained by Odysseus, the young man wavers, necessitating a brusque intervention by Odysseus. The insistence of the latter on the necessity of mobilizing Philoctetes is finally supported by the hovering figure of the deified Heracles, who effects an uneasy compromise between the conflicting perspectives of the mournful hero and the utilitarian statesman. At the end of the play, Heracles announces the end of Philoctetes' suffering. The alienated hero, with his savage wound and wild speech, will be brought back

20 Recall that meanings of the word *deinos* run the gamut from "horrific" to "clever," both of which can be understood as aspects of that which is fearsome. Homer uses the term to mean both "terrible," "fearful," "suffering," etc., on the one hand, and "marvelous," "mighty," and "strange," on the other; only in the classical period does *deinos* come to mean "clever" (often in a bad sense).

21 Harpham 1982.3.

22 Gardiner 1987.20, 44 has noted the similarities between Odysseus' attitude towards Philoctetes and that of the chorus.

to Troy, his poison expelled from his foot, and his babble “cured” by verbal contact as he is reintegrated into the Greek camp.

I. THE DEVOURING MOUTH AND THE ABJECT BODY

The physical signs of Philoctetes’ infection and its emotional effects punctuate the characters’ speech at crucial intervals, the repetition of which emphasizes the links among symptom, mentality, and language. Convulsive cries, unstanchable lesions: both signal what must but cannot really be contained, what, even when quarantined, exists as an infectious threat on the borders of health and normality. In the language of the play, the disease itself seems insuppressible. It becomes associated with the conflation of sensory experiences, which finds its most salient expressions in the activities of eating and speaking: the bestial mouth and (what may be construed as its opposite) the cure of infection through conversation. (I address the latter in section II below.)

In the play’s prologue, Odysseus stands on the untrodden shores of Lemnos and explains why the Greek leaders (at his urging) had transported Philoctetes there: his foul-smelling foot and the wild, ill-omened talk (ἀγρίαῖς . . . δυσφημίαῖς, 9–10) to which it gave rise necessitated (Odysseus says) his removal, since his crying and moaning (βοῶν, στενάζων, 11) made any attempts at ritual practice impossible. Recall that Philoctetes’ voice, lesion, and appearance are all “wild” (*agrios*: νόσον ἀγρίαν, 173; ἀπηργισμένον, 226; ἀγρία/νόσῳ, 265–66; cf. ἡγρίωσαι, 1321) and “fearsome” or “strange” (*deinos*: 147, 218, 733, 755, 756, etc.). When Odysseus, Neoptolemus, and then the chorus of Greek crewmen are first on stage, signs of Philoctetes’ grim existence are all they find of the man: his crude domicile, his dripping bandages, and (eventually) his far-off and frenzied cries. Odysseus’ portrait of Philoctetes suggests that the wounded hero has become the purveyor of some kind of linguistic infection, a type of speech that threatens proper social functioning and thus must be exiled from the community.²³ Odysseus

23 Sophocles uses the phrase διάβορος νόσος to describe the disease that eats Heracles when he puts on the poisoned cloak (*Trach.* 1084), and depicts his cries when poisoned in words similar to those he uses to describe Philoctetes’: βοῶν ἰύζων (*Trach.* 787). This shared vocabulary both reflects Philoctetes’ connection to Heracles and underscores their similar statuses as heroes who are highly revered as necessary defenders of communities and armies and yet pose some threat to these groups by their transgressive, recalcitrant behaviors. Heracles suffers from his own excess, always seeming to have too much of everything: too many stories, too many women, too much contact with the wild. He burns

enjambes this description of Philoctetes' cries with an abrupt remark on his own speech: it is not the right moment for a long narrative, he says (ἄκμῃ γὰρ οὐ μακρῶν ἡμῖν λόγων, 12).²⁴ His aim is a succinct, deft verbal maneuver; if Philoctetes gets wind of Odysseus' presence because of some inadvertent long-windedness on Odysseus' part, he might learn of the strategy (σόφισμα, 14) by which Odysseus means to take him back to Troy. The initial tensions thus created center on the linguistic conflict that arises from the clash of health and disease, characterized by Odysseus as Philoctetes' volatile versus his own controlled and controlling speech.

Odysseus' depiction of the wounded man's linguistic infection conflates the festering, stinking wound and Philoctetes' raving speech, speech that disrupts the functioning of the Greek camp. He describes how Philoctetes' foot oozes with a penetrating disease in words whose staccato syllables seem to imitate the dripping of the wound and whose assonance echoes the moaning tone of the wounded man's cries: νόσῳ καταστάζοντα διαβόρῳ πόδα (7). Odysseus' description of Philoctetes' wound joins vocal tone to bodily function, which itself has both tactile and aural dimensions. The sound of the hero's wound can be heard most distinctly in the words that describe it here and at one other juncture. The second instance occurs when Neoptolemus looks in Philoctetes' cave and sees his rags, heavy with the wound's discharge. He cries out in horrified reaction (ιοὺ ιοῦ), and describes the rags in tones that match their weighted dampness: ῥάκη βαρείας του νοσηλείας πλέα (39). Both instances effect a kind of synesthesia around the experience of the wound, intermingling sound with sight and touch and thereby producing a kind of whole-body reaction to Philoctetes' physical deformity.

A number of other uses of *barus* and its derivatives surface later in the play and serve to underscore this synesthetic effect. Philoctetes' voice sounds heavy with suffering to the chorus: βαρεία . . . αὐ- / δά τρυσάνωρ (208–09).²⁵ When Neoptolemus tricks him into thinking he is offering him

in the end with a poison of his own procuring (*Trach.*) or with a mad and murderous fury sent by the jealous Hera (*HF*). Philoctetes is similarly consumed by his disease (although not to death), but whether he is responsible for this fate is left ambiguous by Sophocles and becomes a central crux of his narrative. Biggs 1966.232 notes, "Philoctetes may pity himself freely and demand pity of others, but he holds no god responsible as do Ajax and Heracles."

24 Cf. Neoptolemus' echo: τοῦργον οὐ μακρὰν λέγεις, 26.

25 βαρύς and its combinations trace similar connections between emotion and situation in the *Ajax* and *OT*, but only in the *Phil.* are the analogies drawn between physical and mental weight so crucial to portraying the hero's state.

passage home, Philoctetes worries that the crew will be “weighed down by the evil smell” of his open wound (βαρυνθῶσιν κακῇ / ὀσμῇ, 890–91). Later, Odysseus orders that Philoctetes be seized (since he has threatened suicide), and Philoctetes delivers a poignant and proudly resistant speech. The chorus responds by conflating the man and his words: “The stranger is weighed down and has uttered this weighty speech” (βαρύς τε καὶ βαρεῖαν ὁ ξένος φάτιν / τήνδ’ εἶπ’, 1045–46).²⁶ In the kommos that follows this episode, the chorus also addresses Philoctetes as “heavy-fated” (βαρύποτμ’, 1096).²⁷ And toward the end of the play, Neoptolemus tells Philoctetes that he will never be rid of his “burdensome disease” (νόσου βαρείας, 1330) unless he returns to Troy.²⁸

The figurative use of words such as *barus* and its compounds, whose more precise physical connotations receded early on in Greek poetry, might seem unremarkable. But the fact is that this type of synesthetic association constitutes the most basic pattern of the play’s meaningful images. Philoctetes’ body is physically weighed down by disease, as his dragging step shows, which, in turn, “weighs down” his lot in life and “burdens” his soul, so that his sickness has a harsh effect on both his body and his mind.²⁹ The repetition of a set of terms that bridge the gap between physical symptom and mental state is purposeful here, since they represent by linguistic connection the pervasive influence of the disease.³⁰ It is not only that the wound gives rise in the hero to harsh and weighty speech, but that it also seems to permeate the speech of those who have encountered it with its noxious associations: the sounds of dripping fluid and cries of pain, and the rearing up of a wild voraciousness—both of which are potentially contained by the curative effects of verbal communication.

A particularly visceral example of this voraciousness involves one additional use of a *baru-* compound, found in the play’s only regular stasimon (676–729), just prior to the episode that marks the most violent

26 Cf. Neoptolemus’ description of his “weighty anger” (ὀργῇ βαρεῖα, 368) at Odysseus’ taking his father’s arms.

27 Cf. *OC* 144.

28 Long 1968.132 argued that such technical terms as νοσηλεία (several of which Sophocles uses in the play) are to be distinguished from more general words for pain such as ἄλγος, the metaphorical uses of which are not new with Sophocles. But Sophocles’ use of these general terms singularly foregrounds both conceptual and physical states.

29 Cf. Hp. *Aër* 15, *Prorrh.* 2.39.

30 Discussing the use of metaphor by the tragic poets, Padel 1992.11 remarks, “Outside explains inside, and vice versa. The two-way connection between them is fluid, ambiguous, mercurial, transformative, and divine.”

eruption of Philoctetes' pain. The chorus is describing Philoctetes' fate in gruesome detail and emphasizing his lack of contact with any human who might respond verbally to him or gather herbs for his wound (both of which would be cures for his pain). They call the disease "harsh-devouring" and "blood-drinking" (βαρυβρῶτ' and αἱματηρόν, 694–95), personifying its effect as a bestial, vampiric fiend. Its origin is similarly vampiric, as Neoptolemus had explained earlier: the "raw-minded" (ὠμόφρονος) nymph sent the pain upon Philoctetes (192–94). In his first speech, Philoctetes had said that he "feeds" (βόσκων) this "gluttonous" (ἀδηνόφαγον) infection (313; cf. the chorus' later phrase οἰκτρὰ . . . βόσκειν, 1167).³¹ In the stasimon, the chorus calls the infection's bestial mouthings a "heart-biting pain" (δακέθυμος ἄτα, 706).³² Somatic sensation is invoked in similar terms when the wound flares up soon after, and Philoctetes screams that it is "devouring" (βρύκομαι, 745)³³ him.

In the same stasimon, Philoctetes' foot is characterized as "beast-infested" (ἐνθήρου, 698). In his commentary, T. B. L. Webster takes this very literally, translating, "inhabited by a wild beast, the snake of the disease," and offers a concrete application of the adjective as a comparandum: the ἐνθηρον τρίχα, "verminous [i.e., lice-infested] hair," of the Greek army (Aesch. Ag. 562).³⁴ But clearly the serpent has not really taken up residence in Philoctetes' foot, as lice really may have done in the hair of the troops. The importance of the adjective lies in its power to invoke the beast itself, to provide an image of infestation all the more horrifying for its lack of distinct physical boundaries between the beast and its victim. Because of the inef-fable, devouring effect of the serpent's bite, Philoctetes himself has had to creep around (εἶπρε, 701; cf. ἔρποντος, 207).³⁵ The verb is cognate with ἐρπετόν, the substantive used especially of snakes (whence "serpent"), so

31 In their (mostly lost) plays, Aeschylus and Euripides both use phrases with similar imagery to describe Philoctetes' disease, according to Aristotle (*Poet.* 1458b20): φαγέδαινα . . . ἐσθίει (Aesch.), φαγέδαινα θοίνανται (Eurip.).

32 Cf. also more weakly metaphorical uses, especially Philoctetes' claim, "the pain of past events does not bite me" (οὐ γάρ με τᾶλγος τῶν παρελθόντων δάκνει, 1358).

33 Sophocles uses similar vocabulary in the *Trachiniae* to describe the poison that eventually kills Heracles (e.g., βρύκει, *Trach.* 987, βέβρωκε, 1054; cf. διαβόρω, *Phil.* 7 and διάβορον, *Trach.* 676, διάβορος, 1084). The vampiric imagery of the poisoned cloak in the *Trachiniae* thus resembles that of the hero's voracious disease in the *Philoctetes* (cf. Sorum 1978.59–60 and Segal 1980.129–31 on the *Trach.*).

34 Webster 1970 (*ad Phil.* 698).

35 As with βρύς, while ἔρω lost its concrete associations fairly early, the sheer physicality of the hero's dilemma suggests that the word has this resonance here.

that the image of the creeping man helps to obscure the distinction between the hero and his invading monster. The disease that pursues him also marks him as its own.

Ruth Padel notes that madness and disease—intimately associated by both the Hippocratic writers and the tragic poets—are identified by such external signs: twisted bodily posture, frantic or bestial bodily movement and expression, and/or discolored, broken, or enflamed skin, whose oozing sores may mark the expulsion of an inner disturbance.³⁶ As a priest of the healing deities Amaryn and Aesclepius, Sophocles would likely have been well acquainted with contemporary medical thought. Hippocratic writers often record the body's external signs as a means to assessing internal distress, and Sophocles expands this reading of the body to include the sufferer's visible character.³⁷ Philoctetes calls the serpent's bite a *χάραγμα* (267), an "engraving" or "stamp" upon his body, and thus the crucial identifying mark of his disease. This unusual word derives from the verb *χαράσσω* ("to strike"), as does the word *χαρακτήρ* (the stamp on a genuine coin, and later a distinct type of individual).³⁸ Philoctetes' bite inscribes on his body his internal disturbance, signaling his status as one invaded by a demonic disease and thus caught between human and animal states.

i. Body Psychology

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva, enlarging upon Freudian theories of ego development, discussed this type of disruption of order and identity as a psychological phenomenon called "abjection." The term marks the subject's experience of the jettisoned phobic object (which thus exists for the psyche only as a trace presence)—the dreadful, dim awareness of which disturbs the

³⁶ Padel 1995.145–48.

³⁷ E.g., Hp. *Epid.* 1–3. Sometimes the Hippocratic descriptions of a fever's progress include a similar connection between visible character type and disease type (e.g., smooth- or dark-haired, reckless or careless, or thin-voiced or rough-voiced types are liable to summer fevers, 1.19). Cf. Plato's associations between bodily type and states of the soul (e.g., *Rep.* 556e), in a discussion that uses disease metaphors to discuss *stasis*. See also section I ii below.

³⁸ Euripides' choruses use the latter term to designate the distinctive mark that should ideally indicate individual worth (*Med.* 519, *Hec.* 379, *HF* 659). Herodotus uses the word to mean a particular dialect (χ. γλωσσης, I 57, 142) and distinctive facial feature (χ. τοῦ προσώπου, I 116; cf. Sophocles fr. 176, Aristophanes *Pax* 220, Plato *Phdr.* 263b). In the first century B.C., Dionysius uses *χαρακτήρ* in its full rhetorical sense (*Dem.* 9; cf. Men. fr. 72, *Phld. Rh.* 2.137S, Arr. *Epict.* 3.22.80).

neat control of the self-critical and self-observational agency that Freud christened the superego. The superego is repulsed by the abject, identified with such sounds and sights as nonverbal screaming, dripping wounds, corpses, and seeks its permanent expulsion. In direct challenge to this hypersocialized agency, the abject is loathsome, uncanny; “it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out.” The subject endures abjection in a state of what Kristeva terms “brutish suffering,” which arises as “a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness” in response to this phobic (non-) object that is perceived by the subject as “radically separate.”³⁹ Kristeva regards abjection as a condition that implies such a radical lack of normal ego development (e.g., it rejects the process of subject-object differentiation) and such (self-) exclusion that it even “challenges the theory of the unconscious” (5).

Abjection thus purportedly represents a more extreme sense of alienation than that involved in Freud’s notion of the uncanny—the dreadful yet secretly familiar object or setting—since it “is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin” (5). Yet Kristeva’s ideas about the abject clearly use Freud’s theories as points of departure and build upon the same network of metaphors, so that the patterns Freud identifies and the metaphors he employs also echo in Kristeva’s narrative. She terms the abject “a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate” (6), while Freud explains the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”⁴⁰ What is abject contravenes any identifiable relation between conscious and unconscious processes; recognizing rather “the fundamental opposition . . . between I and Other or, in more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside” (7). The abject can be at least fleetingly observed through the identification of a personality type that “never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines . . . constantly question his solidity” (8).

Kristeva also emphasizes that the borderline, associative nature of the abject, connecting affect and symptom, human and animal, inside and outside, means that it “can be grasped only as a sign” (46). Abjection thus operates “within the being of language” (45), even as the abject threatens linguistic order by the proliferation of signs, by condensation,⁴¹ by synes-

39 Kristeva 1982.2; cf. Freud 1955.

40 Freud 1955.220.

41 I.e., Freud’s term for the reduction of at least two components of perception (sound and sight) to one sign, which occurs particularly in dreams; see Kristeva 1982.52–53.

thetic metaphor, and by an underlying association between speaking and devouring.⁴² Talkative mouths and voracious beasts: the abject continuously destroys and reconstructs language, precisely because it arouses symbolic expression (here the process by which signs substitute for somatic states), occupying the border between verbal and nonverbal, between human and bestial uses of the mouth. In exploring this borderland, Kristeva discusses a case from Anna Freud's seminar of a little girl with an extreme phobia of being eaten by a dog. The girl talked incessantly and especially liked to repeat "strange and difficult words."⁴³ Kristeva explains the phenomenon as an attempt to incorporate the phobic object (which is identified with the abject), to "devour" it through the excessive use of language. "The abject confronts us," Kristeva remarks, ". . . with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal" (12).⁴⁴

Sophocles did not, obviously, think of either Philoctetes' character or his disease as participating in the abject (as a theoretical category), but I am suggesting that what his pustulating hero experienced on stage before a fifth-century audience is analogous in conceptual effect. Abjection offers a way to understand the close connection between the communal rejection of the diseased man and his own experience of internal conflict. Philoctetes threatens the boundaries between social group and outcast, health and disease, inside and outside, so that Sophocles' play takes its shape from the emotional reflexes of revulsion and exclusion. Philoctetes, formerly a hero like many others, once poisoned is de-integrated (isolated as different) and cast out; the invasion of his disease brings about his geographic and mental isolation. This expulsion of what is at once grotesque and yet too familiar is understood in the psychoanalytic idiom as a necessary reaction to the abject within the system of the superego. In the *Philoctetes*, the corollary role of the overseer and controller of others is primarily occupied by the statesman Odysseus, but a struggle between hero and monster is simultaneously going on within Philoctetes himself.⁴⁵

42 These characteristics surface repeatedly in the first three chapters of the book, which address the topic in general terms (e.g., 10–11, 40–41, 44–45, 52–53).

43 Kristeva 1982.40, 212 n. 5.

44 But abjection is also implicated in what Kristeva 1982.13 calls "our personal archeology": marking a subject's attempts at separation from the maternal precisely through the use of language. The mother is, in the discourse of psychoanalysis, a kind of pre-verbal dark space, which Kristeva (53–54) argues becomes related in the experience of abjection to the body's dark, undifferentiated interior (see also below).

45 The vacillation between the models of the self differentiated from the other as an external object and the self divided against the self (with the object still internalized) is analyzed in

ii. The Diseased Body Politic

The political agenda of Odysseus sets up a struggle paralleled by the psychoanalytic description of the relationship between superego and abject. Philoctetes is undesirable because he impedes the fulfillment of the group's needs, the medium of which is orderly social ritual (including both prayer and battle).⁴⁶ Compare, for example, the varying threats of Heracles, Oedipus, and Medea to the health of the *polis*. They embody in Greek tragedy the confluence and clash of categories that define what is discordant, wild, and sometimes even monstrous. Hybrids in relation to role assignment, these figures incorporate in one being both the hero and his undoing, communication and its subversion, human and animal, male and female, dry and wet.⁴⁷ This combination of opposites registers in emotional terms as a horrifying collapse of (normal) self into (monstrous) other.⁴⁸ Since the assignment of socially constructed and psychologically necessary categories (e.g., gender, social status, citizenship) is fundamental to formulating group and individual identity, whatever convolutes these categories is deeply threatening not only to the individual sense of self but also to the perceived health of the polis. Chris Baldick, in a discussion of nineteenth-century notions of monstrosity, explains the conceptual conjunction between the deformed body and political threat: "The representation of fearful transgressions in the figure of physical deformity arises as a variant of that venerable

Freudian psychoanalysis as a stage in ego development that Freud terms "primary narcissism." This is the point at which the idea of the double arises, a stage before secure subject-object differentiation that lays the groundwork for what is later perceived as uncanny. Kristeva 1982.62 remarks, "Narcissism is predicated on the existence of the *ego* but not of an *external object*; we are faced with the strange correlation between an entity (the ego) and its converse (the object), which is nevertheless not yet constituted."

46 In tracing the history of conceptualizations of disease, Canguilhem 1989.121–22 noted, "To be sick is to be harmful or undesirable or socially devalued."

47 This tendency to be marked by physical excretion is paralleled in the medical literature by the idea that the body is made up of humors, the bad kind of which demand exit in the diseased: madness, for example, was analyzed as moisture in the brain (*Morb. Sacr.* 17). Cf. also Hp. *Epid.* 4 (regarding *apostasis* and excretion), *Morb.* 1.15 (regarding suppuration).

48 Fiedler 1978.27 argues that the shuddering, fascinated reaction of "normals" to the physically deformed has its basis in what depth psychology identifies as a primary stage in the ongoing process of self-definition, which stems from "our basic uncertainty about the limits of our bodies and our egos." For Fiedler, this uncertainty has political repercussions as well: the Freak's outcast status is perceived as a challenge to society's anxious control of what constitutes normality.

cliché of political discourse, the ‘body politic.’ When political discord and rebellion appear, the ‘body’ is said to be not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive, monstrous.”⁴⁹

This association between diseased bodies and civil discord was familiar to tragic audiences (e.g., Aesch. *Choeph.* 69, 279, 282, 470; Eur. *Her.* 34, 272). In his description of the plague, Thucydides similarly associates moral decay with physical putrefaction, juxtaposing the two words he chooses so that their shared sounds echo the connection he is describing: πρῶτόν τε ἦρξε καὶ ἐς ἄλλα τῇ πόλει ἐπὶ πλέον ἀνομίας τὸ νόσημα (“In other respects also, the plague led to the beginning of increased lawlessness,” 2.53.1).⁵⁰ Although a number of the Hippocratic writers make a concerted effort to formulate a physically based rationale for madness and seizures,⁵¹ a corollary to the association between physical and moral decay can be found in many Hippocratic texts. There, as Robert Parker has explained, the purging of the body and the ritual purification of a house or an entire population often converge conceptually, in part due to the archaic belief that most types of defilement came from the gods. A population may, of course, be purified by the identification and ejection of a scapegoat (*pharmakos*).⁵² The infected and debased figure must be strongly differentiated from “normal” individuals and ostracized from the community. The expulsion of the diseased and screaming Philoctetes from the healthy and vocally modulated Greek camp thus parallels an emotional pattern of revulsion that is central to the mythical narrative.

The hero’s disease also seems to be reflected in his living conditions, a relationship between somatic state and physical surroundings that the Hippocratic writers assume is important in diagnosis.⁵³ The exchange between Odysseus and Neoptolemus that follows the prologue reinforces

49 Baldick 1987.14.

50 Here and throughout the translations are my own. Note that the words are (almost) anagrams of each other. Cf. also Thucydides’ description of the Corcyran revolution (*Hist.* 82). In the *Republic*, Plato similarly compares the state riddled by stasis to the sick body (556e2–7).

51 E.g., Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 1.

52 Parker 1983.214–16, 258–60. Parker is interested in the confluence of imagery, which does not discount the fact that many of the medical writers were careful to avoid attributing any symptoms of disease or madness to the gods.

53 E.g., Hp. *Aër.* 1: the good doctor must take the landscape into account in his assessment of what ails its inhabitants; cf. Xenophon *Cyr.* 1.6.16–18 for a layman’s account of the differentiation between healthy and unhealthy places and their relation to types of people.

the spectacle of Philoctetes' rough and disease-ridden existence. Their description of what they see suggests in its constituent elements the nature of the disease itself, so that Philoctetes' affliction also colors the site of his feverish living. While his larger plot suggests a model of health and disease that centers on expulsion, Sophocles' depiction of the wounded hero's living conditions focuses on vacillations between sensory extremes, so that Philoctetes' particular setting captures the flux (the μεταβολή in Hippocratic terms) from disease to health.⁵⁴ His cave is breezily cool in summer and sun-warmed in winter (17–19); below lies a spring, which Odysseus thinks might have dried up (20–21).⁵⁵ All that can be seen of the diseased man at first glance into the cave are a rough drinking cup, firewood, and the drying rags that are used to catch the wound's discharge (38–39).

Modern psychoanalysis vacillates between two similar models for health and disease in describing mental processes, often associating them with physiological instabilities that necessitate expulsion. Freud's famous depiction of the "id," the component of the personality that he identifies as the seat of instinct, casts it in lurid, liquefied terms. A realm, as Freud says, accessible primarily by analogy, the id is "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitations," where competing impulses aim at "the discharge of energy."⁵⁶ For different reasons than the ancient texts but with comparable narrative effect, Freud establishes an isomorphism between physiological and psychological disturbance in this description. The chemical disruption and discharge are equated with the release of libidinal energy through object

54 E.g., Hp. *Vict.* 1.18; cf. Hp. *Fist.* 30 and *Phdr.* 270c–d; also Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 18; Hp. *Nat. Puer.* 12.1–6, 22–26. Lonie 1981.54–55 clarified the humors system in *Diseases* 4 as four kinds of humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, phlegm) aligned with the four conditions of the cosmos (hot, cold, wet, dry) and the four seasons. While Lloyd 1990.31–34, 47–54 pointed out that, because of the agonistic nature of the stances taken by the medical writers, there was little uniformity of thought among them, most work with the theory that the body is made up of humors maintained in balance in the healthy specimen. Many other healers of one sort or another also practiced other techniques, often based on more explicitly magic-oriented notions of cure (Lloyd 1990.31). Padel 1995.40–42 argues that the Hippocratic doctors generally treated both disease and madness as only temporarily present in humans, as capable of entering and exiting human bodies; cf. Lonie 1981.57–59, Canguilhem 1989.39. Lonie connects the two models and notes their antiquity: in both Egyptian medicine and the oldest stratum of Greek medical theory, humors can be good (internal to the body) or bad (intruders from without); all humors encompass this opposition, and thus the flux from health to disease. See also Grmek 1989.293.

55 Note that springs were commonly used to purge or "wash away" both disease and ritual pollution (Parker 1983.212–13, 226–27).

56 Freud 1965b.65.

cathexis to preserve psychological equilibrium. Nor are the terms Freud employs meant purely metaphorically, since he was working under the assumption that the physiological sites of psychic events could be isolated. Freud's close connections between physical and mental states, although based on a trust in modern science, manifest as well a keen sensitivity to verbal imagery and association. If we recall here that Sophocles and the Hippocratic writers describe phenomena in a manner that reflects the influences of both science and ritual practice, the parallels become clearer. Physical purging and ritual purification necessitated medicinal and piacular cleansing, disease or madness might indicate daemonic invasion: the somatic symptom and the state of mind are continually joined, analogized, even sometimes taken as one and the same. The significance of this close connection for the *Philoctetes* lies in its potential to enact in the dramatic context the ritual equivalent of the talking cure.

Connections between bodily symptom and mental state are thus reflected in both the physical and the political environments. Moreover, Philoctetes' exile makes external and communal what the psychoanalyst describes as an internal affective process—the superego's reaction to the abject, in Kristeva's terms. Kristeva argues for the importance of the subjective experience of abjection, while explaining that both individual and social group conflicts and prohibitions “follow the same logic” (68). She herself associates abjection with the *pharmakos* and introduces Sophocles' Oedipus plays in this context. Analyzing the connection between the internal subjective reaction and its social manifestation, she emphasizes the collocation of pollution and the heroic in the figure of Oedipus: “The mainspring of [the *Oedipus Tyrannos*] lies in that ambiguity; prohibition and ideal are joined in a single character in order to signify that the speaking being has no space of his own but stands on a fragile threshold as if stranded on account of an impossible demarcation.”⁵⁷ The polluted, the infected, and the monstrous are disturbingly central to Greek (and especially Sophoclean) heroic identity: they are what the hero fights and what the hero is.

II. NEOPTOLEMUS AND THE TALKING CURE

In the first episode, Odysseus encourages Neoptolemus to abuse the trickster's own wily character in order to secure Philoctetes' sympathies.

57 In the same chapter, Kristeva discusses relevant anthropological material, in particular, the ground-breaking study of Douglas 1969 on notions of defilement.

“It is necessary,” Odysseus instructs Neoptolemus, “when you speak that you steal the soul of Philoctetes with words” (τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ / ψυχὴν ὥπως λόγοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων, 54–55). Neoptolemus has to learn to engage in a type of verbal theft, a deceptive persuasion that is typical of the Homeric Odysseus. That is, he must learn to sway Philoctetes’ soul by fabricating a persona whose outlook closely resembles that of the beleaguered hero, whose speech robs the hearer of access to the actual disposition of the speaker and even, at times, effectively alters the speaker’s appearance.⁵⁸ In some contrast to this agile linguistic maneuvering, Philoctetes is alienated from standard modes of signification—an alienation indicated by the internal audience’s response to his anomalous type, by the repetition in his own speech of words for abandonment and isolation,⁵⁹ and, finally, by his inability to see through the dissembling language that Odysseus instigates and the other characters employ.

i. The Estranged Voice of Pain

In the parodos, Neoptolemus interacts with the chorus as if he and they were viewers of the spectacle, a distancing of perspective that inspires fear of Philoctetes’ alien type. He emphasizes the outcast’s marginality by reference to his life at the extremity (ἐσχατιᾷ, 144) of the civilized world and to his reputation as a fearsome stalker (δαινὸς ὀδίτης, 147). Webster compares Polyphemos’ cave in the *Odyssey*, which is “at the edges” of the world (ἐπὶ ἐσχατιᾷ, *Od.* 9.182), an association that furthers the sense of Philoctetes as a borderland figure with fearsome attributes.⁶⁰ The chorus describes minutely the points of Philoctetes’ pain in isolation: not only has he no one to care for him, always alone in his wild illness (νόσον ἀγρίαν, 173), but, well-born though he may be (180), his only companions are wild

58 Webster 1970 remarks, “Odysseus knows that Neoptolemus naturally acts directly by physical force, but this has to be a victory of words (hence the repeated λόγοισι, λέγων, etc.) over a mind, ψυχὴν (here already in the Platonic opposition to σῶμα . . .)” (*ad Phil.* 72). Viansino 1963, regarding the process by which Odysseus instructs Neoptolemus in deceit, compares Euripides’ solution to the need for deception: “O. si faceva passare per un amico di Palamede caduto in disgrazia per l’odio di O.” (*ad Phil.* 56).

59 E.g., *monos*: 172, 183, 227, 286, 470, 606, 688, 809, 954; *erêmos*: 34, 228, 265, 269, 487, 1018, 1070 (see Biggs 1966.233 nn. 5, 6).

60 Both words are found primarily in the *Od.*, unsurprisingly, since borderlines and wanderers constitute the central schematics of that epic: ἐσχατιᾷ: 2.391, 3.294, 5.238, 4.517, 5.489, 9.182, 280, 10.96; ὀδίτης: 7.204, 17.211, 16.263.

beasts, so that his cries go uncured (ἀνήκεστα, 186).⁶¹ The result of this lack of antidote is that only the babbling echo responds to this far-off and bitter lament (ἀ δ' ἄθυρόστομος / ἄχῳ τηλεφανῆς πικρῶς / οἰμωγᾶς ὑπο χεῖται, 188–90). Philoctetes' wild disease gave rise to his wild voice, which led humans to leave him to the beasts; his wound and his voice here become associated by their distance from the familiar significations that make for meaningful human converse. The chorus associates the isolating effect that the disease has on the hero's speech with his lack of a verbal antidote; conversation, it seems, might somehow purge the bestial infection from Philoctetes' body.

Anticipation of Philoctetes' arrival soon reverberates on stage, as Neoptolemus and the chorus exclaim at his approaching voice and step. His dragging tread (στίβον κατ' ἀνάγ- / καν ἔρποντος, 206–07) and voice heavy with suffering (βαρεῖα . . . αὐδὰ τρυσάνωρ, 208) signal not only that approach but the burden of his lot in a manner that heightens audience awareness of Philoctetes as an uncanny and imminent presence. As the man arrives whose figure has only been indicated by the particular signs of his status—his rough cave, dripping rags, and mournful cries—his voice, in particular, is described as if it were difficult to place, as if some hearer might not understand its import. This voice had been first reported by Odysseus as *dusphēmios*; here, the chorus lyricizes it as a cry in the wilderness (169–90). In the final verses of the parodos, they attempt to describe it initially as the far-off voice of pain.⁶² Then they place it by indicating its tonal quality: not like the rural piping of the shepherd's song, but like that of someone *in extremis* (οὐ μολπὰν σύριγγος ἔχων, / ὥς ποιμὴν ἀγροβότας, / ἄλλ' ἢ που πταίων ὑπ' ἀνάγ- / κας βοᾷ τηλωπὸν ἰω- / άν, 213–17). In their description, Philoctetes' voice resounds with disaster and loss.

When the sufferer at last appears on stage, he worries that his (internal) audience might be squeamish, startled by his wildness (καὶ μή μ'

61 Pucci 1980.54–56 has discussed how pity functions as a “cure” in tragedy for the excesses of sorrow through a suppression of the alien quality of another's pain: understanding comes by analogy with one's own experience. In this ode, it does seem that since Philoctetes has had no audience for his pain (i.e., since he has no witness [like Medea's Nurse] as a channel for audience pity), his experience has not been responded to, recongnized as familiar, and thus somehow mitigated.

62 While Viansino 1963 translates the chorus' use of φθογγά as “rumore di voce” (*ad Phil.* 206), the word generally denotes an extralinguistic utterance, which would call attention to Philoctetes' isolation from (and sometimes tenuous hold on) verbal communication, something the chorus itself describes in detail (169–90).

ὄκνω / δείσαντες ἐκπλαγῆτ' ἀπηγριωμένον, 225–26).⁶³ And they do seem struck dumb by his presence, so long signaled and anticipated by the traces of his extraordinary state.⁶⁴ Seale is one of the few scholars to emphasize the double impact of Philoctetes' rough living conditions and his "barbarous and repulsive exterior" on the internal and external audiences. Seale analyzes the reactions of the internal audience as "a sign the spectator is invited to interpret"—a signaling of the barrier to communication that Philoctetes' appearance represents.⁶⁵ Seale's focus on the visual spectacle that Philoctetes must have furnished for the audience makes progress toward understanding the character's shocking and disturbing impact. The wild appearance of the outcast man, his "strangeness" for the Athenian audience, would then have been reinforced at the narrative level by Neoptolemus' claim that Philoctetes' story is unknown, that he is without reputation (*kleos*) in the Greek community (251–52). The exile is left to believe that he has been so completely removed from human communication that even his story is unknown. That is, his wild look is underscored ironically by his interlocutors' claims that they do not recognize him—highlighting the very strangeness for which he is famous. Neoptolemus' emphatic μηδὲν points up the falseness of his information for the audience (i.e., he protests too much). Both internal and external audiences know that Neoptolemus is lying, and the metatheatrical irony of Neoptolemus declaring before the external audience that Philoctetes' tale is unknown only heightens the sense of isolation that surrounds him.

The gulf between Philoctetes and the other characters is further emphasized by the exile's ingenuous pleasure at the Greek dress and language of his interlocutors. Philoctetes recognizes that he is addressing fellow Greeks, but he has no sense of which ones. He has been taken out of the action—dropped, in effect, from the Trojan story—for so long that he has lost the ability to identify its major characters (cf. 403–45 and Dio *Or.* 59). The wild-voiced, ragged Philoctetes is happy to hear the familiar Greek, and he welcomes the clothes of his culture, ignorant of the deception lurking

63 Recall that Odysseus exhorts Neoptolemus not to "shrink from" deception (ὀκνεῖν, 111), which creates a weak counterpoint between the politician and the outcast: Odysseus' character type is morally dubious, while Philoctetes' visible type is physically repulsive. Philoctetes similarly points up the potential contrasts between Odysseus' character and his own physical state at 1006 (cf. below, n. 86).

64 Webster 1970 thinks that Neoptolemus hesitates in answering because of his reluctance to deceive (*ad Phil.* 230), but the fearsome figure so fully detailed by the chorus sets the stage for its and Neoptolemus' startled reaction to Philoctetes once he comes onstage.

65 Seale 1982.32.

in their most “most beloved” dress and speech (σχῆμα . . . στολῆς . . . προσφιλεστάτης, 223–24; φίλτατον φώνημα, 234). He seems insufficiently wary of his fellow countrymen, who are after all members of the same community that exiled him. More used to contact with animals, Philoctetes is easily duped by the words and gestures of goodwill offered by his human interlocutors, and, because of this, he ultimately hands over Heracles’ bow, the instrument of his survival. He has become, in effect, a stranger to linguistic custom and thus ignorant of the subterfuge it makes possible.

Although Neoptolemus does seem eventually to provide Philoctetes with some “talking cure,” when he first speaks, his role also resembles that of Odysseus, since, at least initially, he deceives Philoctetes and thus inhibits real communication. His sympathetic response to the mournful man is tempered in part by his use of an Odyssean persuasive technique, which centers on mirroring the self-image of one’s interlocutor. Neoptolemus associates himself and his tale with Philoctetes and his, echoing Philoctetes’ own words (e.g., 321 and 314; 344, 347, and 260; 346 and 265–66; 355 and 254; 359 and 274; 389–90 and 315–16). Most pointedly for this discussion, in his recounting of his sufferings to Neoptolemus, Philoctetes refers repeatedly to his sickness (*nosos*, 258, 266, 281). The young man then allies himself with Philoctetes’ pain by using the cognates *algêma* and *katalgeô* to describe the pains of the wounded man and the pain he himself felt when he learned that Odysseus had received his father’s arms.⁶⁶ The complexity of Neoptolemus’ presentation lies in the layered quality of its rhetorical structure, which highlights an emotional and reactive self-representation that both reflects certain aspects of Neoptolemus’ own character and resembles closely that of his interlocutor. Compare the persuasive tactics of the Homeric Odysseus, whose famous lies in the *Odyssey* are carefully molded to intermingle his own character type with that of each person he attempts to deceive.⁶⁷

In the course of the central scenes, however, Neoptolemus’ use of language begins to reflect more and more intimately Philoctetes’ own, as the young man increasingly identifies with the suffering hero. Two types of verbal spectacle seem to precipitate Neoptolemus’ reversal: Philoctetes’ powerful supplication speech, made pitiful and grotesque by his body’s

66 The word *group* is one Neoptolemus uses repeatedly to refer to both emotional and physical discomfort (cf. 86, 734, 806, and see above), while Odysseus declares that such pain is precisely what he does not feel (66).

67 See Worman 1999 for further elaboration of this persuasive technique.

debility, and the subsequent attack of the disease, which causes him to babble in frenzied response and to writhe about in physical anguish. In the supplication speech, Philoctetes repeatedly emphasizes his wretched state and his status as a suppliant, in a manner consistent with his piteous depictions of his isolated life: “Do not,” he begs, “leave me so alone, abandoned in these awful circumstances that you see” (μὴ λίπης μ’ οὕτω μόνον, / ἐρήμιον ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖσδ’ οἷοις ὀρᾶς, 470–71). He falls at Neoptolemus’ knees (or perhaps tries to), although, as he says, he is an “uncontrolled wretch, a cripple” (προσπίτνω σε γόνασι, καίπερ ὦν / ἀκράτωρ ὁ τλήμων, χολός, 485–86).⁶⁸ Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that this move causes a horrified but empathizing reaction in Neoptolemus (486–87). Seale makes a point of how this grotesque vision affects him, noting that Philoctetes’ hideousness arouses in the young man an intimation of “the more mysterious value of the repulsive and helpless Philoctetes himself.”⁶⁹

But Neoptolemus does not merely recognize in Philoctetes some inner worth. Rather, he begins to see in this frighteningly pitiful figure his own beloved self-image: the moral code of the would-be hero, the yearning pride in lineage, the rejection of the deceptive tactics that mark the politician. Something in this recognition of self in other both repulses and compels Neoptolemus, and his resolve soon begins to crumble in the face of this confusing affiliation. Compare Freud’s description of responses to the uncanny, the “unhomely” (*unheimlich*) yet strangely familiar effect: “The layman sees in [the effects of epilepsy and madness] the working of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-men, but at the same time he is dimly aware of them in remote corners of his own being.”⁷⁰

ii. The Voice of Pain Up Close

Not long after his first display of persuasive agility, Philoctetes goes suddenly silent (730ff.). When Neoptolemus questions this abrupt loss of speech, the wounded man breaks out in groans. Neoptolemus then asks why he is “struck dumb” (lit. “apoplectic,” *κάπόπληκτος*, 731), and

68 Webster 1970, following Jebb 1890, notes that taking ἀκράτωρ as “without control” would more precisely capture how Philoctetes’ physical condition might impede his attempts to kneel (*ad Phil.* 486; cf. *ad* 466).

69 Seale 1982.39.

70 Freud 1955.243.

Philoctetes replies that it is nothing terrible (οὐδὲν δεινόν, 733). He uses the term that will reverberate throughout the rest of the episode, intensifying the fevered atmosphere with an obscuring dread. Although the disease seems to have a voice of sorts, Philoctetes admits that its horrible pain is unspeakable (δεινὸν γὰρ οὐδὲ ῥητόν, 756). In this episode, the wound controls Philoctetes' ability to speak: it gives rise to nonsignifying babble or silences the man altogether.⁷¹

A textual crux in this section of the episode may offer a distinct and vibrant picture of the struggle between the hero and his internal beast, as well as attributing to it a voice that incites barking pursuit. Above (section I), I discuss the metaphorical patterning that links the disease to the uses of the mouth; here similar metaphors also link the disease to the hunter and Philoctetes to the hunted. For example, as Neoptolemus views the onset of pain with horror he exclaims, "the shout of the disease is fearsome" (δεινὸν γε τοῦπίσιγμα τοῦ νοσήματος, 755).⁷² The word ἐπίσιγμα means "a calling on of the hounds." Its usage here helps to obscure the distinction between Philoctetes and his toxic foot: the hero becomes the hounded prey of the shouting disease (cf. his earlier cry, "it pierces through me" [διέρχεται, 744]).⁷³ He asks Neoptolemus to attack and sever his foot, the site of the beast's creeping infestation; he wants to do battle with its monstrous presence inside of him, from which he cannot divorce himself.⁷⁴

Philoctetes later recalls the close relationship that his infection has established between himself and the birds and beasts of prey, when, in furious reaction to Neoptolemus' revealing that he has been deceived, he exclaims that without his bow he himself will become the prey of those animals he formerly hunted (956–58). The hunting beast is an inarticulate but volatile presence in the character of Philoctetes, and the interplay here between strange significations, screaming, and silence focuses attention on

71 Philoctetes' expressive anguish, which reflects some deformation or loss of language, some indication of the extent to which intense pain cannot be signified in any orderly semantic system, can also be compared to the verbal extremes of female tragic lament, which inhibits the forward movement of the plot by its abandonment of the logic of communication.

72 Reading ἐπίσιγμα, *seq.* Webster (*ad Phil.*755) and Long 1968.78–79.

73 Philoctetes uses this same verb earlier, when he laments that "tidings [of his fate] never penetrated [διήλθε] to his home nor to anywhere in Greece" (255–56). Word-of-mouth reports (κληδών) may penetrate into houses as diseases pierce through bodies.

74 Hippocratic writers often use military vocabulary (Padel 1992.56); and cf. again Plato *Rep.* 556e2–7.

the multiple obstacles to communication in the play. Earlier, Philoctetes was hindered in his attempt at verbal maneuvering by a plot of which he was unaware, so that his effective use of language was a product of delusion, unrelated to reality. Now, like this plot, the wound impedes his ability to communicate, eliciting from him cries and frenzied conversations with it, rather than with other humans. He “cannot hide the evil thing within him,” which bursts out of him in verbal explosions that mark his inner turmoil (κοῦ δυνήσομαι κακὸν / κρύψαι παρ’ ὑμῖν, ἄτταταῖ, 742–44).⁷⁵ The episode is punctuated by the voices that seem to erupt from the wound: Philoctetes cries out from it, responding to it as a living being “hunting” him, as Neoptolemus suggests. When he shouts convulsively, his voice shunts from the lyric syllable to the semantically overdetermined outcry: ᾠ ᾠ ᾠ ᾠ (732, 739) gives way to the babble of ἀπαππαπαῖ (745–46, 785ff.), which seems to capture both the child’s name for his father (πάππα) and Philoctetes’ usual formal tag for the young Neoptolemus (παῖ). The label παῖς (often “of x”) is probably more formal than paternal;⁷⁶ Odysseus is also called παῖ—by Neoptolemus, in fact (87, echoing Odysseus’ Ἀχιλλέως παῖ, 50). During his attack of fever, Philoctetes calls Neoptolemus by the less formal label τέκνον, so that his language has the effect of combining all possible relations between the two men.

This is a terrifying conflation, a reversion to a state of nondifferentiation between subject and object, self and other, child and parent. Neoptolemus, for his part, responds with similar distress, further identifying with Philoctetes and echoing the words of his lament: ἰὼ ἰὼ δύστηνε σύ, he cries (759; cf. 736, 745). Some lines later, Neoptolemus exclaims that he too is in pain (ἀλγῶ, 806), associating his guilty deception of Philoctetes with the hero’s disease (ἄλγησις, 792) (see further below). The intense identification between Philoctetes and Neoptolemus occurs as the infected foot shakes the mind of the older man most severely. At the onset of pain, Philoctetes’ responds to the spasms with a reaction that is paralleled in the

75 The medical model provided a central means of characterizing the loss of equilibrium that was thought to accompany madness in the tragic character, most evident in his altered speaking style and physical transformation (cf. Ajax, Heracles, Orestes). The author of *Sacred Disease*, for example, details the physical features of an epileptic seizure as a loss of speech (ἄφωνος), as well as choking, frothing at the mouth, twisted or clenched hands, and rolling eyes (Hp. *Morb. Sacr.* 10; for ἄφωνος cf. Hp. *Epid.* 1.57–58, 64, 313; *Morb.* 3.8). *Epid.* 1 also describes cases in which the sufferers babble (ἐλήρει, 86) and exhibit “unclear speech” (γλῶσσα ἀσαφής ἦν, 317).

76 Blundell 1988 notes Philoctetes’ paternal attitude toward Neoptolemus.

psychoanalytic idiom by that of the subject to the phobic object (which is often equated by Kristeva with the abject in one's own psychic structure). He focuses on his throbbing foot, perhaps the most crucial mark of his identity, as the site of the fiendish disease, and thus the enemy. His speaking self, the site of potential reason and control, reacts as a victim of an uncontrollable, chaotic physical compulsion.

The disease's presence thus makes calm converse impossible, both because the ravaging mouth of infection inhibits bodily function and because its poison causes volatile speech to erupt from the wounded man's mouth. It is these disruptive uses of the mouth that Neoptolemus must counter with a palliative verbal response that might cause the outbursts to abate, a use of language that makes a communicative bond like a salve for Philoctetes' oozing sore. The linguistic cure can, however, only come about after the young man has experienced a kind of feverish identification with the diseased hero, brought on by the devouring onslaught of pain. If Philoctetes, his own voice, and that of his disease are called *deinos* (see also above, I), the emotion he inspires in Neoptolemus is similarly *deinos*: "Some terrible pity has fallen upon me" (ἐμοὶ μὲν οἶκτος δεινὸς ἐμπέπτωκέ τις, 965), the young man says, in response to Philoctetes' anger at his deception.⁷⁷ In Neoptolemus, in particular, Sophocles locates the emotions and mental states that correspond to Philoctetes' condition. Neoptolemus tends to echo Philoctetes' vocabulary of disease, often associating it with emotional reactions or responding to Philoctetes' tendency to personify it. For example, just prior to the disease scene, Philoctetes had remarked to Neoptolemus that his illness "desired to have [Neoptolemus] as companion" (τὸ γὰρ / νοσοῦν ποθεῖ σε ξυμπαραστάτην λαβεῖν, 674–75). Then, at the beginning of the scene, Neoptolemus inquires whether Philoctetes is crying out because of "the pain of the accompanying disease" (ἄλγος . . . τῆς παρεστώσης νόσου, 734). The personified disease wants Neoptolemus as

77 Earlier in the play, Philoctetes uses *deinos* to mark Thersites' cleverness of speech (440), which has a disturbing aspect to it; he repeats the label later regarding Neoptolemus' "strange tale" (δεινὸν αἶνον, 1380), which Webster notes usually means "animal parable" (*ad Phil.* 1380). In the *Il.*, the deformed man's speech is itself (according to the poet) misshapen (2.212–22). In myth, Aesop and Thersites both quarrel with aristocrats and are treated as *pharmakoi*. They are ugly and low-born, and Thersites, in particular, is the embodiment of "grudge"—which, Parker 1983.260–61 argues, is "a power that was probably associated, in an obscure way, with the ideology of the scapegoat" (cf. 214 for his discussion of extra-medical uses of the word φάρμακον to designate a kind of ritual purgative).

companion, and Neoptolemus characterizes the presence of the disease with a related verb (παρίστημι).

The mark of this companionship, Neoptolemus' tendency to equate his emotional anguish with Philoctetes' physical distress, grounds the process of the conversational cure in repeated verbal parallels. The use of ἄλγος in this passage to designate a physical symptom is echoed by Philoctetes' deployment of a more technical term (ἄλγησις) later in the scene (792),⁷⁸ which is, in turn, echoed by Neoptolemus' use of ἄλγος again, but this time to designate his own emotional state (806; see also above, II i).⁷⁹ Similarly, when Philoctetes asks Neoptolemus if he is silent out of disgust at his disease (δυσχέρεια τοῦ νοσήματός, 900), Neoptolemus responds that disgust (δυσχέρεια, 902) arises when one, "having deserted his own nature," behaves in an unbecoming manner (902–03).⁸⁰ Later, Neoptolemus' uses of the verb παύω reveal a parallel set of associations: he says in despairing tones, "I have finished" (πέπαυμαι, 1280), regarding his attempts to persuade Philoctetes. Then, trying again, he promises Philoctetes an "end to the burdensome disease" (παύλαν . . . νόσου βαρείας, 1329–30) and healers who will "stop the pains" (παύσοντας ἄλγους, 1379). The end to conversation signals the continuation of the disease, while talk promises its cessation.

A somewhat more oblique correspondence may be present in a pair of scenes that also tie together notions of emotional companionship (as expressed by speaking) with physical cure. Philoctetes uses the verb λῆξαι (commonly used among medical writers to mean "stop pain" or "cure") when he tells Neoptolemus that his attack is abating (768).⁸¹ Later, when

78 Philoctetes uses ἄλγησις when wishing that Odysseus might experience his pain. Long 1968.132–33 argues that -sis forms denote a present state of being and constitute "a subjective statement of feeling," an important distinction here in that Philoctetes does wish on Odysseus precisely his own experience of pain. The more general term ἄλγος, the figurative uses of which Long considers unremarkable because such uses existed already in archaic literature, also serves to bridge the gap between somatic symptom and mental state in this peculiarly body-oriented play (cf. 1011, 1021, 1169–70, 1326).

79 Neoptolemus uses the verb with this meaning earlier (86); cf. Philoctetes' later uses of algocognates: ἀλγεινῶς (1011), ἀλγύνομαι (1021), ἄλ-/γημ' (1169–70). Philoctetes employs such words in a manner that includes emotional distress (esp. ἀλγεινῶς), physical suffering (esp. ἀλγύνομαι), and the sum of the two (esp. ἄλ-/γημ').

80 Neoptolemus' image of "leaving his own nature" echoes Philoctetes' question to him at 896: "Where," he says, "have you wandered in your speech?" (ποῖ ποτ' ἐξέβης λόγῳ;), and engages in the figurative use of feet and walking that is so pervasive in the play (cf., e.g., 1f., 29, 147, 432, 487, and 1260).

81 Cf. λήξαντος at 638; Webster 1970 (*ad Phil.* 637) argues that Philoctetes' use of the verb here in combination with ὕπνον foreshadows the disease scene.

Neoptolemus again despairs of persuading Philoctetes to accompany him to Troy, he uses the same verb to denote “stop talking” and connects this action on his part to Philoctetes’ continued lack of a cure: ὥς ῥᾶσ’ ἐμοὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων λήξει, σὲ δὲ / ζῆν, ὥσπερ ἤδη ζῆς, ἄνευ σωτηρίας (1395–96). In Neoptolemus’ statement, the lack of communication or failure to persuade coincides with Philoctetes’ ongoing disease (i.e., λήξει is a negative term in relation to speech, but a positive one in relation to disease). In an earlier passage, Neoptolemus had suggested that contact with the disease might have a negative impact on communication. There he warns the chorus that being a companion to the disease could bring about a failure to adhere to words formerly spoken (ὅταν δὲ πλησθῇς τῆς νόσου ξυνουσίᾳ, / τότ’ οὐκέθ’ αὐτὸς τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις φανῇς, 520–21). Companionship is thus manifested most importantly in conversation; its absence is made consonant with the presence of disease. And, more disturbingly, the disease can affect intention, causing one to break one’s word by means of its noxious presence.

III. ODYSSEUS: THE VENOMOUS POLITICIAN

When Odysseus describes Philoctetes’ dripping disease and deems his moaning tones *dusphēmios* because they disrupt camp ritual practice, he is signaling an awareness that the grotesque man and his erupting cries impede orderly speech and therefore challenge the maintenance of social order. Odysseus’ words, on the other hand, seek to further the smooth functioning of the camp—whether he speaks *in propria persona* or through other characters. The careful style and covert persuasive tactics of the statesman’s speech contrast sharply with the lyricizing, mourning voice of the hero, whose wound inhibits speech and maintains a constant presence in the language of the play.

Nevertheless, a strong similarity exists between the way Odysseus’ deceptive persuasion inhibits Philoctetes’ ability to speak effectively and the way the serpent’s poison invades Philoctetes’ speech. In combination, these result in role confusions and echo effects that highlight Philoctetes’ identity deformations: this alarming inclusion in one being of proud hero and volatile, beast-infested mourner. As his pain and horror at his own fated impasse increase, Philoctetes pointedly allies Odysseus with both the serpent and its venom, on the one hand, and with a hunter, on the other. In so doing, he initiates an additional chain of inferences that signals the threatening collapse of statesman and beast, pursuer and pursued—a condition analogous to the conflation of heroic self and monstrous other with which

Philoctetes has been living for so long. This further confluence of the agents of deceit and disease constitutes the most disturbing way in which the hero's infection leads to his inadvertent role in the disruption of community cohesion, in part through the threat his infection poses to the fixity of identity.

This threat first surfaces in connection with Odysseus when Philoctetes responds to the news of Odysseus' arrival on the island with fierce reaction, calling him "a thorough harm" (ἡ πᾶσα βλάβη, 622). Note that βλάβω can have the connotation "deceive" when it refers to mental damage, so that the word suits Odysseus precisely, as well as linking him in his effect on Philoctetes to the latter's bodily damage (i.e., the harm caused by the serpent). Philoctetes then declares that he "would sooner hear that the most hated snake" were to take him (θᾶσσον ἂν τῆς πλείστον ἐχθίστης ἐμοὶ / κλύοιμ' ἐχίδνης, 631–32) than that Odysseus lurked somewhere nearby. If Philoctetes' language seems often controlled by the infection of the serpent, here he reveals that he regards Odysseus as equally threatening, by virtue especially of his unbridled language and aggressive acts: ἀλλ' ἔστ' ἐκεῖνφ πάντα λεκτά, πάντα δὲ / τολμητά (633–34).⁸² Deceptive speech controls and impedes communication through its pervasive, all-consuming nature, in a manner comparable to the bodily invasion and disruptive intrusion on language that arises from the serpent's venom.

Odysseus and the disease both hunt Philoctetes. In response to Odysseus' order that he be seized, Philoctetes characterizes himself twice in three lines as "hunted" by Odysseus (συνθηρώμεναι, 1005; ἐθηράσω, 1007). Some lines later, in the same bitter speech, Philoctetes allies the death of his enemies with the end of his illness, asserting that he might think "that [he] had escaped his disease" (τῆς νόσου πεφευγέναι, 1044; cf. 1166) if he were to see the Greek leaders dead. Both his inflamed foot (the internal aggressor) and the Greek leaders (the external aggressors) are agents of his physical chaos—agents that have infected his speech, making vocal modulation and careful word choice impossible.⁸³ In almost the same breath, he

82 Viansino 1963 (*ad Phil.* 634) compares Palamedes' description of Odysseus in Gorgias' *Pal.*: ὁ πάντων ἀνθρώπων τολμηρότατε, and the similar phrase used by Philoctetes in Euripides' *Phil.* (πανουργότατε ἀνθρώπων Ὀδυσσεῦ, Dio Chr. 59.9). In the story he told to Philoctetes, Neoptolemus had deemed Odysseus' speech extremely bold: τλημονέστατον λόγον (363).

83 Compare Freud 1965b.65–66, who describes the id as "the dark, inaccessible part of our personality," which is "open at its end to somatic influences, . . . taking up into itself instinctual needs which find their psychical expression in it . . . but it has no organization."

addresses his foot, ὦ πούς, οἶά μ' ἐργάσῃ κακά (786), and his human persecutors, Odysseus first and foremost (791–95).⁸⁴ This alliance between the hero's foot and the hero's enemies arouses a response in the suffering man that is like an offensive attack: Philoctetes wants his pain to pierce through the breast of Odysseus like a spear (791–92).⁸⁵ Odysseus does not, of course, himself experience the invasion of disease. Rather, he functions in the same manner as that disease, so that in this most gruesome display of Philoctetes' putrid foot and stricken, unkempt body, Odysseus becomes allied with the beast and its venom, but as an agent rather than a victim of its terrifying effects. The inversion of roles here complicates any neat distinctions between controlling statesman and volatile outcast.⁸⁶ For Kristeva, the comparable psychic event is an inevitable outcome of the experience of abjection: the agent of mental oversight becomes identified with the id and the object body, while the shuddering subject reacts against this enemy presence by attempting to extricate himself from its compulsion.⁸⁷

The visceral details and role conflation of the *Philoctetes*, again, neither reflect the outlook of nor have any apparent effect on the wounded hero's primary enemy, Odysseus. Setting up a distinct contrast with tragic effect and the audience's reaction to pathetic spectacle—which is staged in eerie anticipation of Philoctetes' alien presence—Sophocles depicts Odysseus as unemotional in the extreme, coolly intent on the control and coercion of the disruptive agent that Philoctetes embodies. While Neoptolemus shudders at the sight of the rags dripping with discharge from the snake bite, Odysseus regards these merely as the metonymic signifiers of the bitten man. Language is uniquely salient and pervasive for Odysseus, to the extent

The id is merely a chaotic conglomeration of “instinctual cathexes seeking discharge,” the roiling force of which often overwhelms the ego. See also Freud 1938.

84 The scholiast remarks that Philoctetes talks to his foot as to a “savage beast” (ὥς ἐπὶ θηρὸς δὲ ποιεῖται τὸν λόγον, *ad Phil.* 758 [Elmsley 1825.290]). Both Masqueray 1942 and Nauck 1886 remark that diseases were often personified, comparing Hes. *Op.* 102ff. Webster notes that the text is problematic, in part due to the fact that the MSS might actually show a desire to fix Philoctetes' extra-metric exclamations (e.g., ἀλλὰ for ἄ ἄ ἄ ἄ); for the possible dochmiacs, he compares Electra's break into anapests (*El.* 1160–62).

85 Padel 1992.50 says, “Suffering is like a weapon,” citing this episode as an example. Cf. Lonie 1981.57 on humors as “intruders.”

86 Cf. 1006, where Philoctetes, as Odysseus orders that the infected man be seized, addresses him with a similar conflation of his character with Philoctetes' physical state: “O you who never think a healthy nor a free thought” (ὦ μηδὲν ὑγιὲς μηδ' ἐλεύθερον φρονῶν).

87 E.g., Kristeva 1982.2–3.

that even the evidence of disease communicates in quasi-linguistic terms (e.g., σήμαιν', 22; cf. 37–41); for the exiled Philoctetes, in contrast, even symbolic expression that should communicate linguistically has lost its proper shape, deformed by the onslaught of disease (e.g., διάσημα θροεῖ γάρ, 209). Odysseus is too pragmatic, too concerned with linguistic control and the manipulation of appearance, to respond with emotion to the visual evidence of Philoctetes' diseased existence. Instead, he emphasizes that his own presence must not be signaled by a similar sighting (45ff.), and encourages Neoptolemus to help him maintain his cover.

I should also emphasize again that Philoctetes is not himself some monstrous entity, although he feels its effects—unlike Odysseus, who seems personally immune to the conflation of his role with that of the serpent. Philoctetes is never identified with the serpent, but his infected state precipitates his sense of being invaded and taken over by some ravaging beast. This tragic struggle is paralleled by the subject's experience of the abject in Kristeva's narrative: the invasion of the loathsome other into the psychic realm of the superego, the "symptom" of which is, Kristeva argues, "the rejection and reconstruction of languages" (45). The monitoring capacity of the superego seeks to control the abject's disruptive presence, which registers as threatening in subjective experience because of its nonconformity to psychic order. Kristeva (like Freud) works with a close association between psychic and physical phenomena, precisely because the abject occupies the juncture where mental state meets somatic symptom: "The *symptom*: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor . . ." (11). Compare Freud's descriptions of melancholy: "internal hemorrhage," "wound," "hole . . . in the psychical sphere."⁸⁸ This notion of a quasi-physical psychic affect that threatens to spread through the conscious being attempts to identify a phenomenon comparable to the perspective-altering (and thus quasi-psychic) nature of Philoctetes' disease, which, at times, so permeates his being that he seems to become it, being identified and identifying with its wild onslaught.

In Sophocles' play, Odysseus' deception and Philoctetes' infection equally inhibit language and stable role definition, in a manner that conflates the somatic symptom with verbal disorder—as does Kristeva's depiction of abjection. Philoctetes' infection by the serpent has altered his outlook and use of language, a situation paralleled by Odysseus' poisonous inhibiting of

88 Freud 1895.205–06. Kristeva 1982.55 quotes this passage in another context.

effective communication. This kind of sly control, which operates through deceptive speech, identifies the power struggle between the overly socialized statesman and the savagely lonesome hero as one organized around linguistic isolation. Even as he seems to the hero to operate like the venomous serpent, the watchful Odysseus also serves within the plot as the agent of pest control. He seeks to contain the convulsive explosions of Philoctetes' bodily pain and unmodulated voice through systematic alienation, a verbal quarantine that restricts the meaningfulness of the infected man's speech by forcing him to respond to a falsely construed reality.

IV. THE DIVINE ANTIDOTE?

As the play approaches its end, references to a possible end to Philoctetes' suffering, and a cure for his disease, proliferate (e.g., 1327, 1379, 1424, 1438). When Heracles appears, he mandates a truce between the two warring perspectives. His resolution in the pragmatist's favor puts a sudden end to his protégé's resistance to Odysseus' plot, and Philoctetes' switch from bitter outcast to obedient soldier is jarringly abrupt. Heracles' *muthos* seems to offer the definitive linguistic antidote to Philoctetes' verbal excesses (if not to his physical pain), which then provides an instantaneous stabilization of his temperament.⁸⁹ The spectacle of the diseased and embittered Philoctetes being promised restoration to his former status by a hovering divinity provides a final dramatic catharsis that anticipates Philoctetes' physical catharsis.⁹⁰ As is more common in Euripidean drama, the *deus ex machina* circumvents a deeply aporetic human conflict. In the *Philoctetes*, this conflict takes place around the diseased body of the hero, and the appearance of the god does little to mitigate the lasting effect of Philoctetes' grotesque, volatile, and agonizing presence. This is a play about physical suffering, the continuous display of which is underscored by the embattled

89 Segal 1981.352 regards this intervention as indicating Heracles' role as mediator "between deceptive human *logos* and divine *muthos*, between illusion and truth." Podlecki 1966.244–45 argues similarly: "The *lógos* of rational argument is here transcended; we have in their [sic] place the *utterance* of a divine voice." Heracles' *muthos*, in fact, privileges the smooth functioning of the social group over individual satisfaction, "normalizing" Philoctetes by revealing his place within the group dynamic.

90 The word is commonly used in the Hippocratic corpus to indicate purgative treatments (Parker 1983.213). But cf. *Morb. Sacr.* 2–3, where the author polemicizes against "quacks" who depend on ritual purifications (*katharseis*); he prescribes regulation of diet and body care instead (ὕπν διαιτης, 21.24).

state of the hero's mind and his struggle to extricate himself from others' verbal control.

Philoctetes' wild appearance, mobile temperament, and, especially, his disrupted and disruptive voice all combine to present an image deeply unsettling in its insistent foregrounding of the reflex against what disgusts and startles in its eerie familiarity, like Freud's uncanny: the inhuman cry, the stranger's pain, the hideous foot that still looks like one's own. It is this, as Kristeva says, that "[we] permanently thrust aside in order to live."⁹¹ This stinking, explosive hero, with his dripping wound from the bite of a toxic beast and his mournful pride, embodies an internalization of otherness that threatens group function and identity. Sophocles' drama centers on Philoctetes' heroic refusal to become "normalized" in order to serve the group's needs—precisely because he is, like Ajax, faithful to heroic mandates. In the extant plays of Sophocles, there seems to be no real solution within the human context for these heroic types; only divine intervention may effect some cure. Unlike, for example, Theseus' resurrection of Heracles in Euripides' play, human *philia* cannot fully salve the polluted, exilic bodies of Sophocles' heroes and reintegrate their unstable, isolated perspectives. Adherence to an older order makes these characters, in effect, bad democrats, who remain embattled with both the community and the enemy within.⁹²

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⁹¹ Kristeva 1982.3.

⁹² I would like to thank Helene Foley, whose suggestions at an earlier stage improved this paper immensely, and the anonymous reader for *Arethusa*, who provided some critical criticisms and corrections.

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