Sophocles Ajax 68–70
A reply to Professor Eduard Fraenkel

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θαρσῶν δὲ μίμνε μηδὲ συμφορὰν δέχου
τὸν ἄνδρ’ · ἐγὼ γὰρ ὀμμάτων ἀποστρόφους
αὐγὰς ἀπείρξω σὴν πρόσοψιν εἰσιδεῖν.

In a recent issue of Museum Helveticum (20, 1963, 103–106), Professor E. Fraenkel condemns as an interpolation lines 68–70 of Sophocles’ Ajax. He is not the first to cast doubt on the passage. E. Reichard[1] rejected the lines as being inconsistent with what follows (lines 74. 83–85), and was supported by Nauck in the eighth edition of Schneidewin’s commentary (1882). Recent scholars however have accepted the lines. Professor Fraenkel now argues that the dramatic inconsistency of these verses is accompanied by linguistic difficulties which together confirm interpolation. My purpose is to defend the passage against both these lines of attack.

We may begin with the linguistic difficulties. Professor Fraenkel finds the construction of δέχεσθαι in vv. 68–9 θαρσῶν δὲ μίμνε μηδὲ συμφορὰν δέχου / τὸν ἄνδρ’ unintelligible. Two explanations are generally suggested. Either συμφοράν is taken as a second accusative after δέχου, ‘do not regard the man as a disaster’, or τὸν ἄνδρ’ is made the object of μίμνε and the words in between, μηδὲ ... δέχου, understood parenthetically, ‘and do not expect disaster.’ The former explanation is adopted by Schneidewin, Hermann, Blaydes, Jebb, Radermacher, Campbell and Mazon-Dain[2]; Whitelaw, Wunder, Lobeck and Schaefer adopted the latter; Kamerbeek is prepared to accept both! I would agree with Professor Fraenkel in doubting this second interpretation. What of the former?

Professor Fraenkel’s problem is the absence of an exact parallel for the double accusative with δέχεσθαι. Now δέχεσθαι frequently takes two accusatives when it has a literal sense ‘receive’, cf. Thuc. 1, 43 Κερκυραίους τούσδε μήτε ξυμμάχους δέχεσθε ‘neither receive these Corcyraeans as allies’. But δέχου, if συμφοράν is dependent upon it, must have in addition an intellectual sense, ‘consider’, ‘regard as’. δέχεσθαι may certainly have such a sense, cf. Plato Epist. 3, 315c 7 σὺ δ’ ἀναγνοὺς αὐτά, ὅπῃ βούλει δέξασθαι, ταύτῃ δέχου ‘take’ (i.e. ‘regard’) ‘them in whatever way you like’[3]. If then συμφοράν is a second accusative (Campbell’s ellipse of ὡς is a sensible suggestion), we may suppose δέχου to be used like ἀπέδειξεν at Plato Theaet. 166a 5 γέλωτα δὴ τὸν ἐμὲ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀπέδειξεν. Why is it

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[1] *De interpolatione fabulae Sophoclis quae inscribitur Aiax* (Jena 1880) 14.

[2] This explanation is also preferred by W. B. Stanford in his new edition of the play, *Sophocles Ajax* (London 1963).

[3] So also Plut. *De Def. Orac.* 415 d οἱ μὴ καλῶς δεχόμενοι τὴν γενεάν, where δεχόμενοι means ‘explain’, ‘interpret’.

easier to 'show someone as a laughter' than to 'receive someone as a disaster'?
For both passages we might cite as a model Hdt. 4, 79 συμφορὴν μεγάλην ἐποιή-
σαντο 'they regarded the matter' (understood) 'as a great misfortune'. 'Sophocles'
Greek is rarely simple and often ambiguous. He shows a liking for abstract nouns
in reference to persons, loosely constructed, often in apposition to a sentence or
another noun[4]. We find κόρην ... παρεσδέδεγμαι ... λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα (Tr. 536–8)
'I have received the girl .... (as) a merchandise'; the singular ὑπαγκάλισμα
in apposition to the subject of the plural verb μίμνομεν ib. 539–40[5]; διαφθοράν
(sc. Aerope) in apposition to the unexpressed object of ἐφῆκεν Aj. 1297 etc. Hence
the absence of an exact parallel for δέχεσθαι with a double accusative is not in
itself an argument for impugning the lines, when we are aware of Sophocles'
boldness in applying abstract nouns to persons. I would suggest that Sophocles
intended his audience to understand δέχου in both a literal and an intellectual
sense, and selected the word by reason of its being able to perform this double role.

Professor Fraenkel's second difficulty is πρόσοψιν, line 70. He argues that to
be intelligible here πρόσοψις must possess a concrete sense, 'face', whereas during
the fifth century the word never «eine andere Funktion hat als die eines Nomen
Actionis zu προσορᾶν». He states that commentators and lexicographers have
behaved with «beträchtliche Willkür» in interpreting this word, and dismisses out
of hand the statement by Stephanus-Dindorf, adopted by Jebb, that πρόσοψις is
a poetic alternative to πρόσωπον[6].

Professor Fraenkel is quite right to point out the absence of uniformity in
translations of πρόσοψις. But to quote every passage in which πρόσοψις appears
during the fifth century, without in the most crucial cases offering his own com-
ment or translation, is unconvincing. πρόσοψις might denote both the action of
προσορᾶν, 'looking at', or the result of the action, 'what is looked at'. In the latter
case it might perfectly well mean a particular thing looked at, that is to say a
concrete 'object of sight'. ὄψις frequently has such a sense, and for another -σις
noun so used by Sophocles we may compare Aj. 8 εὖ δέ σ' ἐκφέρει / κυνὸς Λακαίνης
ὥς τις εὔρινος βάσις, where βάσις means 'going', 'movement', and Ph. 1378 πρὸς
τοὺς μὲν οὖν σε τήνδε τ' ἔμπνον βάσιν, where βάσιν clearly refers to Philoctetes'
'festering foot'. The question is whether there are other passages in which the
sense of πρόσοψις is concrete, or at least possibly concrete. At Pindar Pyth. 4,
29, I would accept Professor Fraenkel's 'Anblick', φαιδίμαν ἀνδρὸς αἰδοίου
πρόσοψιν (πρόσωψιν C) θηκάμενος, though one should note that Paley[7] translates
πρόσοψιν by 'countenance', Rumpel[8] gives 'facies' and Holt[9] suggests 'visage'. But

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[4] For δέχεσθαι in Soph. with an abstract noun as its direct object, used in a personal
sense, cf. *Tr.* 376 εἰσδέδεγμαι πημονὴν ὑπόστεγον.
[5] I have discussed this passage in Cl. Rev. (NS) 13 (1963) 128s.
[6] Professor Stanford, op. cit., translates πρόσοψις by 'face'.
[7] F. A. Paley, *The Odes of Pindar* (Cambridge 1868).
[8] I. Rumpel, *Lexicon Pindaricum* (Lipsiae 1883).
[9] J. Holt, *Les noms d'action en -sis (-tis)*, Aarskrift for Aarhus Universitet 1941, 106.
Holt finds that πρόσοψις is used with substantially the same sense as ὄψις.

at Soph. El. 1285 προὐφάνης δὲ φιλτάταν ἔχων πρόσοψιν, Jebb's 'countenance' and Campbell's 'form' are no less probable than 'looks' or 'expression' for Electra's welcome of Orestes. It is even more difficult to deny a concrete sense at Eurip. Hel. 636, where Menelaus addresses Helen with ὦ φιλτάτη πρόσοψις (cf. ὦ πρόσωπον εὐγενὲς τέκνων Md. 1072). 'Dearest face' is the most natural apostrophe.

But even if it were true that πρόσοψις may not have any concrete application in the fifth century, this would not give any ground for suspicion. LSJ (s.v. πρόσοψις) suggests that σὴν πρόσοψιν εἰσιδεῖν is a periphrasis meaning 'person', 'self', or 'presence'. This suggestion does not merit Professor Fraenkel's censure. Sophocles not infrequently uses abstract nouns to refer to persons by periphrasis when he wishes to concentrate attention upon a particular quality or action. Thus σὴν πρόσοψιν εἰσιδεῖν could perhaps mean 'to see your looking at (him)', i. e. 'you, looking at (him)' just as ἡμῶν παρουσίαν El. 1104 means 'us, being present', and πατρὸς ... δευτέραν ὁμιλίαν ib. 418 means 'the father, associating for a second time'. An even bolder example, which I have discussed elsewhere, is ὅταν παρουσία φράζῃ ib. 1251, 'when presence gives the signal', that is 'when they give the signal, by their presence'[10]. If πρόσοψις then has an abstract sense, it may be taken as a periphrasis for the person. Or if πρόσοψις is, as it may well be, concrete, then the word is an ornate alternative to πρόσωπον, just as γένεσις Tr. 380 equals γένος, οἴκησις Ph. 31 equals οἶκος etc.

Professor Fraenkel proceeds to suggest that an interpolator modelled Aj. 69–70 on Euripides' Or. 1020 ff., ὥς σ' ἰδοῦσ' ἐν ὄμμασιν / παννστάτην πρόσοψιν ἐξέστην φρενῶν. A greater probability is that Euripides himself based Alc. 876–7 εἰσιδεῖν φιλίας ἀλόχου πρόσωπον upon Sophocles' line. The 'interpolator' worked cleverly, for the grandiloquence of lines 68–70 is entirely consistent with the rest of Athene's speech (cf. especially 53–55), hardly what we should expect from someone tampering with the text.

I turn now to the 'dramatic inconsistency' of the lines. Professor Fraenkel makes two points: first, Odysseus' astonished question in 84 πῶς, εἴπερ ὀφθαλμοῖς γε τοῖς αὐτοῖς ὁρᾷ; in reply to Athene's assurance that he will remain invisible to Ajax, implies that «with a regrettable lack of respect for the goddess, he had not previously heard correctly», i.e. lines 68–70. The second argument is that 'diverting the gaze' (69–70) is substantially different from 'darkening the sight' (85).

Now the second argument is of little significance, if we can bring objections against the first. For if, as Jebb and others maintain, it is dramatically relevant for Athene to repeat her assurance to Odysseus, then we should not expect an exact repetition. The only substantial difference between the promise in 69–70 and that given in 85 is one of emphasis. σκοτώσω βλέφαρα is a simpler and stronger statement to the effect that Ajax will not see Odysseus. Athene can achieve this in many ways and if it is necessary for her to reassure Odysseus, it is natural enough that her language be more direct than the allusive ὀμμάτων ἀποστρόφους αὐγὰς ἀπείρξω, which

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[10] See my discussion in Cl. Rev. (NS) 14 (1964) 130ss.

had failed in its effect. In neither case, as καὶ δεδορκότα 85 shows, will Ajax be temporarily blinded; thus the result of her actions will in each case be identical.

Judgments about dramatic relevance are too subjective to admit of positive proof but there are certain points which I would urge against Professor Fraenkel. With or without lines 68–70 Odysseus requires 15 lines of stichomythia before he accepts (and even then reluctantly) Athene's decision to call out Ajax. Sophocles therefore treats Odysseus' reaction to this situation in considerable detail because of its relevance to his presentation of the character of Odysseus. If Odysseus were as confident in Athene as lines 34–35 suggest, πάντα γὰρ τά τ' οὖν πάρος / τά τ' εἰσέπειτα σῇ κυβερνῶμαι χερί, we might expect him to accept her rebuke in 75 without demur, οὐ σῖγ' ἀνέξῃ μηδὲ δειλίαν ἀρῇ. The fact is that Odysseus is under-standably terrified of Ajax in his deranged condition, and also, as Bowra observes[11], «reluctant to derive enjoyment from the spectacle», ἐμοὶ μὲν ἀρκεῖ τοῦτον ἐν δόμοις μένειν (80). If lines 68–70 are satisfactory in terms of Greek, may we say that they are also germane to the plot? Athene desires Odysseus as a witness to the madness of Ajax, 66–70, and assures him that he need not be afraid. Confident in her own powers she does not wait for comment by Odysseus and proceeds at once to summon Ajax. The function of the stichomythia which follows, as Adams has shown[12], is to test Odysseus' reliance on Athene's guidance. Is it dramatically weak (or psychologically unconvincing) for a naturally cautious man to react not to a promise uttered three lines previously but to the immediate terrifying situation, and cry τί δρᾷς, Ἀθάνα?[13] The cry gains dramatic intensity because of the previous assurance and the goddess who gave it. An Athenian audience, encountering Odysseus and Athene together on stage, could not fail to recall the Odyssey, and it seems highly probable that Sophocles in this scene is not departing from tradition. The general situation is comparable to Od. 13, 300ff. There Odysseus, newly returned to Ithaca, accuses Athene of tricking him (326–7), in spite of the goddess's assurances (300–310), and she respects him for his wariness. Even at lines 358–60 Odysseus is still doubtful so that Athene must say (362): θάρσει, μή τοι ταῦτα μετὰ φρεσὶ σῇσι μελόντων. So too in Sophocles Odysseus only reluctantly accepts Athene's assurances, and at the end of the stichomythia declares that he would prefer to be far away (88): μένοιμ' ἄν· ἤθελον δ' ἂν ἐκτὸς ὢν τυχεῖν; μένοιμ' ἄν looks like a deliberate resumption of line 68 θαρσῶν δὲ μίμνε.

Professor Fraenkel is right to recall attention to the difficulties in this passage, but his recourse to amputation exaggerates the seriousness of the case[14].

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[11] C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 36ff.

[12] S. M. Adams, *Sophocles the Playwright* (Toronto 1957) 27ff.

[13] Professor Stanford's comment on the situation, which I read after completing my own argument, is eminently sensible: "In fact Odysseus is only showing reasonable caution. Nobody in his senses would want to confront a raving maniac of Ajax's formidable powers. Sophocles emphasises Odysseus' apprehensions to increase the interest of the audience in the entrance of Ajax, not do disparage Odysseus."

[14] Professor Fraenkel's paper has now been reprinted in his *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie* (Rome 1963) I 409ss.