

**A COUPLE OF CONJECTURES THAT POINT
TO HANDS IN SOPHOCLES**

Time has been short, dear Bernd, for cooking up something for this publication in your honour. Since I have been preoccupied recently with completing and proof-reading my new translations of Sophocles, I hope you may savour a side-dish to them, hot from the oven. This elaborates a couple of related textual conjectures that have occurred to me in the course of preparing the version, changes that would bear on Sophocles' theatricality. These are not, then, traditional "emendations" because the text makes good sense without them; they rest on dramatic grounds rather than philological.

As you will be aware, it is not easy for a translator (at least for an academic one) to know what to do about stage-directions. Since they are all inevitably editorial additions, it would be the purest policy to omit them altogether, adding nothing to the text as transmitted. But, given the convention of printed stage-directions in modern times, this rigour would be downright unhelpful to contemporary readers – and might lead to a skewed diversion of awareness away from performance and theatricality. So the translator has to decide what stage-directions to spell out. Some are so slight and obvious as to need no specific inclusion; some, on the other hand, would be too conjectural or too interfering to be justified without special pleading. But, concentrating on those which are pretty clearly implied by the text itself and are worth specifying, the deictic pronouns in the Greek are particularly helpful, especially the most immediate of those indicators, the ubiquitous ὅδε, ἦδε, τόδε etc.

I have spotted a couple of places where the change of a simple article to a deictic would add an extra charge to the stage-embodiment, leading me to wonder whether a single letter might have been squeezed out in the course of transmission. These are moments where, in other words, a deictic, had it been transmitted, would be interpreted as carrying positive theatrical significance. The gain in physicality makes the conjecture at least worth considering.

My prime instance comes at *Philoctetes* line 262. Neoptolemus has protested that he has no idea who the unkempt outcast before him may be. Philoctetes, disappointed, then introduces himself, citing the bow of Heracles even before his own name:

ὄδ' εἶμ' ἐγὼ σοι κείνος, ὃν κλύεις ἴσως
τῶν Ἡρακλείων ὄντα δεσπότην ὄπλων,
ὁ τοῦ Ποίαντος παῖς Φιλοκτήτης...

The importance of the bow has, of course, already been introduced (especially at 113–115); and Philoctetes has been visibly carrying it since his entry at 219. The question is: when is attention first drawn to the bow itself as a physical object? Given our transmitted text, it might be claimed that this key moment is deliberately postponed all the way until 652 ff; and that this is a rather effective deployment of false naivety on the part of Neoptolemus. He does not want to betray a keen interest in the prize, it might be claimed, and waits until that late moment: ἦ ταῦτα γὰρ τὰ κλεινὰ τόξ' ἃ νῦν ἔχεις; But this does not really work because Philoctetes himself has already drawn attention to the object much earlier, and has even, indeed, used a deictic indicator at 288, when he is explaining how essential the unerring weapon was for his very survival:

γαστρὶ μὲν τὰ σύμφορα
τόξον τόδ' ἐξηύρισκε, τὰς ὑποπτέρους
βάλλον πελείας...

In view of this τόδε here, my suggestion is that back at 262 we should restore τῶνδ' Ἡρακλείων ... ὄπλων. And in that case the bow would not only have attention drawn to it when it is first introduced, it would surely be held up for all – including the audience – to see. This bow here is going to be so crucial to the whole play and its physical embodiment, crucially changing hands to Neoptolemus and then back again, that I would go so far as to say that I hope that Sophocles used τῶνδε because it would be dramatically stronger.

My second proposal comes from *Oedipus the King* (*OT*), and, while similar, it is also crucially different: the *Philoctetes* passage draws deictic attention to the present, that in *OT*, characteristically, draws attention back to the past. Hands, always important in Greek tragedy, are an especially crucial motif in *OT*, a play in which past handling and past violence are essential to the whole story and its reconstruction. Thus, for example, when Oedipus tells how he killed the old man at the place where three

cart-tracks meet, he emphasizes that he struck him with his staff, wielded by “this hand” (810–812):

ἀλλὰ συντόμως
σκήπτρω τυπεῖς ἐκ τῆσδε χειρὸς ὕπτιος
μέσης ἀπήνης εὐθὺς ἐκκυλίνδεται·

He goes on to draw out the rather macabre consequence that, if that old man was Laius, then the hands that killed him are the same as those which have made love to Iocasta, his widow (821–822):

λέχη δὲ τοῦ θανόντος ἐν χεροῖν ἐμαῖν
χραίνω, δι’ ὧνπερ ὤλετο.

Hands are, naturally, of crucial importance in reconstructing the first days of Oedipus’ life, when he was carried as a baby from Thebes to Cithaeron and from there to Corinth. Iocasta tells how Laius (and implicitly she as well) handed over their baby to be exposed on the mountain by “someone else” (719): ἔρριψεν ἄλλων χειρῶν εἰς ἄβατον ὄρος. Those hands of the faithful servant-shepherd will be a vital link in the chain that forms Oedipus’ life-story, because he gives the baby to the shepherd from Corinth. And he in turn tells how he handed the baby Oedipus on to Polybus at Corinth. Polybus was not his blood-father, he tells Oedipus, but adopted him, a gift to the childless king from the shepherd (1022) δῶρόν ποτ’, ἴσθι, τῶν ἐμῶν χειρῶν λαβῶν. My suggestion is that if this were to be changed to τῶνδ’ ἐμῶν χειρῶν, then the handing over would not only be presented as a past fact, but would be given a physical immediacy by the old shepherd reaching out with his hands, just as he had done at Corinth all those years ago. This would not be an “emendation”: it is suggested as a minimal textual change that restores a strong extra theatricality to the narrative sequence, and which makes the past more vivid in the present.

I might add, as a coda, that the physicality of touch is sustained right through to the final scenes of *OT* – and beyond. When the now blind Oedipus calls his little daughters to him so that he may embrace them, he says (1480–1481):

ᾠ τέκνα, ... δεῦρ’ ἴτ’, ἔλθετε
ὡς τὰς ἀδελφὰς τάσδε τὰς ἐμὰς χέρας...

(here, as often, χεῖρες means arms as well as hands, of course). This tableau of the blind father/brother holding his two daughter/sisters in his

arms seems to have become a kind of icon of the Oedipus story, to judge from the way it is re-enacted in *Oedipus at Colonus* (*OC*). When Ismene first arrives, Oedipus calls for her touch, and she confirms that she holds both him and Antigone in an embrace (329). The family embrace is even more emphasized when the two daughters have been rescued and brought back by Theseus at 1100 ff. They approach their father together, and he rejoices in their closeness, telling them to cling to him (1112–1114): ἐρείσατ', ὦ παῖ, πλευρὸν ἀμφιδέξιον / ἐμφύντε τῷ φύσαντι... Finally, the Messenger tells how, when the final thunder sounded, Oedipus held out his arms to embrace his daughters (πτύξας ἐπ' αὐταῖς χεῖρας), and how they clung to each other (1620). And, when the end approaches, Oedipus speaks his final words to them (1640–1644), holding them in his arms for the last time: Οἰδίπους ψάσας ἀμαυραῖς χερσὶν ὧν παίδων λέγει...

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The need to include stage-directions in a new translation of Sophocles has drawn attention to – predictably – the bow in *Philoctetes*, and – less predictably – to hands in *Oedipus*. This has led to the proposal of changing a simple article to a deictic indicator at *Phil.* 262 and *OT* 1022. These are offered not as emendations of the transmitted text but as plausible improvements which call for the addition of only one letter.

Проблема отражения сценических ремарок в новом переводе Софокла привлекла внимание автора к луку Филоктета (что неудивительно), а также (что более неожиданно) к роли рук в трагедиях об Эдипе. Так возникла идея заменить обычный артикль указательным местоимением в *Phil.* 262 и *OT* 1022. Речь не идет о необходимых исправлениях, без которых текст был бы непонятен, но добавление всего одной буквы дает лучший смысл и потому выглядит правдоподобным.

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