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**THE INVENTION OF A DECEPTIVE DIALOGUE:  
RECONSIDERING THE FALSE-MERCHANT SCENE IN  
SOPHOCLES' *PHILOCTETES***

AVGI-ANNA MAGGEL

**Past and present events in the island of Lemnos**

In the prologue of *Philoctetes*, events of the past are reenacted in the light of the present situation in which Odysseus and Neoptolemus disembark on the island of Lemnos and start looking for Philoctetes. Odysseus, once responsible for Philoctetes' abandonment in Lemnos,<sup>1</sup> now is the person who takes on the duty of fetching him back, complying with the orders of the Greek chiefs. Philoctetes and his unerring bow and arrows were considered to be indispensable to the Greek army in order to defeat the Trojans and conquer the city of Troy (196–200).<sup>2</sup> Odysseus transfers to Neoptolemus the difficult task of deceiving Philoctetes and leading him treacherously to the ship for Troy.<sup>3</sup> The two men arrive at Lemnos in different ships and are followed by their own sailors. In the opening scene one of these sailors stands closer to Odysseus and at the end of the discussion Odysseus points to him as the scout (σκοπός, 125) who will return to assist Neoptolemus in carrying out the deception plan.

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\* This essay is the revised version of an oral paper presented at the International Conference of Greek Drama in Delphi 2004. I would like to thank Professor P. E. Easterling for her helpful comments on the present paper.

<sup>1</sup> The story of *Philoctetes* is told in Hom. *Il.* 2,721ff. See also n. 8 below.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. lines 598–600.

<sup>3</sup> However, Neoptolemus is not at all convinced that *deception* is the best means to use in order to induce Philoctetes to follow him to Troy. He is not ready to accept into his mind the plan of deceit fashioned by Odysseus, even with the prospect of sharing the benefits of victory in the conquest of Troy together with Philoctetes (cf. 110//120). For Neoptolemus' 'Odyssean' tactics against his 'Achillean' choice of life see O. Taplin, "The Mapping of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*", *BICS* (1987) 69–77.

Odysseus hastens to leave in order to avoid a dangerous encounter with Philoctetes. Beforehand, he warns Neoptolemus that he will send the sailor in the guise of a merchant, if Neoptolemus seems to be delaying. Later on, after the first encounter between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes (219–538), the Chorus announce the arrival of an unknown man, who enters escorted by a sailor from Neoptolemus' ship (539–41). The stranger is Odysseus' σκοπός feigning to be the sailor-Merchant.

However, in the prologue of the play the sailor is a mute person with the minimal dramatic importance that auxiliary mutes usually carry in the cast of playing roles. His comeback in line 542 is of a different nature since he has been replaced by the third actor, that is, a speaking person who pretends to be a merchant, and his role in this scene has much more importance in the dramatic action than it had in the prologue.

The False-Merchant scene in *Philoctetes* has caused a lot of discussion in relation to its dramatic necessity in the play.<sup>4</sup> Critics have speculated about the coherence and the integration of the scene in the play, since it is evident that Neoptolemus has managed to gain Philoctetes' trust and they are both ready to leave Lemnos when the sailor arrives. One reason might be that Odysseus has grown impatient waiting at the ship because he has no knowledge at all of the happenings seen by the spectators, and could be suspecting that Neoptolemus may be suffering agonies of conscience and in danger of blowing up his plans. Therefore, the False-Merchant arrives at the opportune moment when Neoptolemus and Philoctetes on stage have established a point of friendship and trust between them. Moreover, the audience envisage an act shaped by Odysseus who – unaware of Neoptolemus' doings on stage – sends the sailor to tell a story and thus to help Neoptolemus in deceiving Philoctetes and leading him to the ship for Troy.

At the moment of his arrival, we attend carefully to see what sort of words the False-Merchant will invent to make the deceit of Philoctetes appear more persuasive. It seems that invention of deceitful words is somehow intermingling with persuasiveness. How is Neoptolemus, who has already

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<sup>4</sup> Later Greek adaptations of the play have not included the scene in their scripts. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Nicolas Piccolos produced a translated adaptation of the play without the Merchant scene, probably following its French adaptation by Jean François de la Harpe (1739–1803). See D. Spathis, *Ο Διαφωτισμός και το Νεοελληνικό Θέατρο. Επτά Μελέτες*, Thessaloniki 1986, 145–198, esp. 165. In the most recent adaptation of the play by the Greek playwright V. Zioghas, *Φιλοκτήτης*, Athens 1990, the scene does not feature either.

gained Philoctetes' trust, going to take advantage of the sailor's deceitful words?<sup>5</sup> It seems that the question why Sophocles has introduced the whole scene into his play can be raised once again.

In the following analysis the deceptive dialogue between Neoptolemus and the False-Merchant is thoroughly examined in order to show how a 'chain of words' is intermingled with true and untrue events for the invention of a speech that will have a powerful effect on Philoctetes causing him to follow Neoptolemus to the ship. At the same time, this mixture of truth and lies also sharpens the audience's awareness of the onstage action. All through the scene they must be wondering how to understand what they hear: What is true and what is false in all these exchanges of words? To what extent is the False-Merchant functioning the inventor of a deceptive dialogue that brings forth Neoptolemus' cautious replies and also affects Philoctetes' silent hearing?

The False-Merchant arrives in Lemnos with the alleged task of bringing news to Neoptolemus from Troy. His announcement is divided into three stages: two dialogical parts in which he transmits to Neoptolemus the 'facts' in Troy (542–72, 573–82), then he pretends secrecy over Philoctetes' name in order to attract his attention (582–602), and, finally, the Merchant concludes with a narrative speech in which he exposes the prophecy of Helenus for everybody to hear (603–21). Next, I will try to show how the three stages of the deceptive dialogue produce a 'chain of words' that links different off-stage locations in the past with what is heard on stage in the present.

### **Real and unreal 'facts' in Troy<sup>6</sup>**

In the prologue Neoptolemus was warned by Odysseus that a story would follow together with the arrival of his False-Merchant. Now Neoptolemus

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<sup>5</sup> In the prologue of *Philoctetes*, Odysseus mentions that Neoptolemus must take advantage of the sailor's words, but he does not explain further what these words will be like; cf. ποικίλως αὐδωμένου 130–31.

<sup>6</sup> O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus. The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 1977, 83 n. 2 says that when the False-Merchant enters, he reports events which will prove to be 'half-truths'. This paper attempts to distinguish true from untrue events in the Merchant's report. In a drama there is always awareness on the part of the audience that they are witnessing a fiction, and therefore the definition 'true' and 'untrue' is limited by the terms set up for a particular play. In *Philoctetes*, these characters are not 'really' Philoctetes and Neoptolemus but actors impersonating them, and the events dramatized are shaped by the dramatist, not independently verifiable.

conducts a question-by-question enquiry, asking the sailor what he knows about the 'facts' in Troy.<sup>7</sup> The Merchant warns Neoptolemus that a delegation of the Greek army is pursuing him and another one, with Odysseus and Diomedes, is coming to fetch Philoctetes to Troy (561–2//571–2).<sup>8</sup>

The first announcement is false, and the theatre audience are able to recognize that the Merchant is referring to an unreal fact. However, the news makes a different impact on Philoctetes, because he had already heard from Neoptolemus (cf. 360ff.) that the latter left Troy furious against the Atridae, who awarded his father's weapons to Odysseus and not to himself (cf. 360 ff.).<sup>9</sup> So Philoctetes perceives as a real fact what exists as an unreal fact for Neoptolemus.

The second announcement is true: Odysseus would have substantial reasons to pursue Neoptolemus, if Neoptolemus had actually abandoned Troy, but, instead, he is sent by the Greeks to fetch 'somebody else' to Troy (ἐπ' ἄλλον ἄνδρα 570).<sup>10</sup> While the Merchant mixes up false with true news, it is Neoptolemus who names Odysseus twice (568, 572), but he avoids openly mentioning Philoctetes' name. The text does not help us to see how Philoctetes reacted on hearing Odysseus' name, though the stress on the name of Odysseus

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. lines 559–60, 563, 565–66, 568–69, 572.

<sup>8</sup> We expect that the audience should be aware of the epic legend according to which Diomedes went to Lemnos to fetch Philoctetes and Odysseus went to Skyros to fetch Neoptolemus to Troy as in the Proclus' *Little Iliad* 20–30 (see T. W. Allen, *Homeri Opera*, vol. v, Oxford 1969 repr. 106). In 431 Euripides offered a new version of the story in which Diomedes is sent along with Odysseus to Lemnos to find Philoctetes, thus combining the epic tradition and the Aeschylean version of the play. Cf. R. C. Jebb, *Philoctetes*, Cambridge 1898<sup>2</sup> xv–xvi. The new version by Sophocles would aim not only at contributing to the inventiveness of the deception speech, but also at arousing the curiosity of the audience in relation to Sophocles' theatrical innovation.

<sup>9</sup> F. Budelmann, *The Language of Sophocles. Communal, Communication and Involvement*, Cambridge 2000, 101–3 speaks about 'mythical innovations' according to which Neoptolemus "changes the tradition that many spectators know", while speaking about himself, and follows the same version of his past at the end of the play, when Philoctetes reminds him of the deprivation of his father's arms by the Atridae. Cf. Neoptolemus' story in lines 343–90 with lines 1363–5//1362. However, it is Odysseus in the prologue who suggested this version of Neoptolemus' story, and now it is the False-Merchant who continues to alert Neoptolemus in a deceptive way about the consequences of his alleged flight from the Greek camp in Troy.

<sup>10</sup> Neoptolemus speaks about Odysseus but makes no mention to Diomedes. Cf. 591–95 where the False-Merchant first speaks about the two men but ends his speech by omitting Diomedes. For Diomedes' omission in the report of prophecy see n. 24 below.

must be significant for him.<sup>11</sup> But Philoctetes remains silent.<sup>12</sup> However, the audience must have recognized that the Merchant's last words ἐπ' ἄλλον ἄνδρα (570) and Neoptolemus' subsequent question 'πρὸς ποῖον αὖ τόνδε;' (572) are allusions to Philoctetes that he himself is unable to understand at the present circumstances.

### Low voice and secrecy

At line 573 the temper of dialogue changes into a lower tone. The Merchant starts speaking in a low voice, altering the normal utterance of his words.<sup>13</sup> He speaks aside, pretending that he wants to be heard only by Neoptolemus. It is at this time only that the Merchant acknowledges Philoctetes' presence, otherwise feigning ignorance of the man who has been following the conversation silently throughout.<sup>14</sup> From this point on the dialogue is conducted with pretending secrecy, aiming to stir Philoctetes' curiosity further as well as to prepare the ground for the narrative of the prophecy.<sup>15</sup>

The Merchant asks Philoctetes' identity in a 'low' voice and also appeals to Neoptolemus for a reply in a 'low' voice so that Philoctetes cannot hear them.

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<sup>11</sup> For the importance of *hearing* both deceitful and sincere words see further.

<sup>12</sup> This paper extends the ideas about the function of silence in lines 542–627 of the play presented in A.-A. Maggel, *Silence in Sophocles' Tragedies*, Ph.D. diss., London 1997, 297–304. Here the stress is on the overall design of the dialogue, which produces the effect of deception by contrasting different *degrees of speech and hearing* between the three acting persons.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. also the 'low voice' at 22: προσελθὼν σίγα σήμαινε. Σίγα might either refer to προσελθὼν (J. C. Kamerbeek, *Philoctetes*, Leiden 1980) or to σήμαινε (S. Montiglio, *Silence in the Land of Logos*, Princeton University Press 2000, 227 n. 96. and later 279 for line 574 where the Merchant, like Odysseus, recommends a 'low voice'). If Odysseus' treacherous plan starts as soon as he speaks in the prologue, then σίγα may refer to σήμαινε and signifies that the 'low voice' is part of his stratagem to deceive Philoctetes in the Merchant scene. Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones H. – N. G. Wilson, *Sophocles Fabulae*, Oxford 1990, repr. 1992, on 22 that σίγα "may mean no more than 'quietly' as in *Antigone* 700 (τοιᾶδ' ἐρεμνὴ σίγ' ὑπέρχεται φάτις)".

<sup>14</sup> Kamerbeek (above n. 13) on 573–4: "He simulates ignorance of Philoctetes in order to avoid any suspicion of deceit".

<sup>15</sup> Cf. D. Mastronarde, "Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek Tragic Stage", *University of California Publications in Classical Studies* 21 (1979) 83 n. 21: "Secrecy is maintained in order to accomplish some stratagem or conceal guilty knowledge."



However, Neoptolemus pronounces Philoctetes' name in such a 'loud' voice (575), that the Merchant pretends to be filled with anxiety and, feigning the same 'low' tones of secrecy as he did in the previous lines,<sup>16</sup> he carries on pretending to warn Neoptolemus about the forthcoming danger: He should leave the island immediately, that is before the arrival of his alleged pursuers (576–7).

The impact of lines 573–7, which combine the low tones of the Merchant with one loudly spoken utterance of Neoptolemus (575), reinforces the curiosity of Philoctetes, who enters the dialogue so as to question Neoptolemus about the meaning of the dark words that the sailor tries to hide from him (578–9). The point is of interest, because we realize that so far Philoctetes has been a silent witness throughout the preceding conversation, and now he plunges into the dialogue, picking up the words citing his name, and the following words presumably concerning him. Philoctetes might have noticed the behavioral expression of the Merchant's whispered words but he does not seem to understand this mood of secrecy.<sup>17</sup> So he seeks explanations from Neoptolemus, who pretends ignorance and insists that the sailor must reveal all the evidence of his knowledge before the two men (578–9//580–1).

After his brief interference in lines 578–9, Philoctetes falls back into silence, and Neoptolemus, by turning his attention from him to the Merchant, launches into a new sequence of dialogue with him (582–602). Now the secrecy is dispelled by another deceptive device: at 582–4 the Merchant pretends that he

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<sup>16</sup> D. Bain, *Actors and Audience. A Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek*, Oxford 1977, 84–85 thinks that the merchant is the deceiver, and Sophocles did not mean to present Neoptolemus as a deceiver too. Otherwise Neoptolemus would have taken μή φώνει μέγα (574) "as an attempt to transmit some secret instructions from Odysseus" For line 575 stated in a loud voice Bain (as before) 84 n. 1 says: "ὄδ'...ὁ κλεινός indicates a kind of public utterance." Montiglio (above n. 13) 278 argues that "Sophocles puts face to face two opposite registers of speech: the openness and completeness advocated by Neoptolemus and the half-words uttered by the merchant in a half-voice."

<sup>17</sup> Jebb (above n. 8) on 578 f. thinks that "Seyffert's change of τί με into τί δε is no improvement. It is natural that Ph., the ἀνὴρ ὑπόπτως (136), should suspect some design against himself" Lloyd-Jones & Wilson believe that "Seyffert's δε is necessary" because "Philoctetes can hardly say that the 'merchant', who has only just learned who he is, is selling him". Jebb's interpretation makes sense, since Philoctetes heard Neoptolemus uttering his name at 575 and might have noticed the secretive manner of the Merchant at 576–7, which made him suspect the 'trafficking' of the words. So the verb διεμπολᾶι might allude to Philoctetes' suspicion that the words between the Merchant and Neoptolemus are said in order to deceive him.

is afraid of the Atreidae, if he reveals what he knows. Only after he has received the reassurance from Neoptolemus that he and Philoctetes are allies in their hatred of the Atreidae, does the Merchant agree to speak out about the plans of the Greeks. Again the references to Philoctetes as an active listener to the discussion (585, 588, 591) suggest that while Philoctetes keeps silence the Merchant's words do not fall in a vacuum. On the other hand, Neoptolemus follows the stratagem of deception by commanding the Merchant, once again, to reveal what he heard during his stay in the Greek camp (587–8).<sup>18</sup>

Presumably, this part of the dialogue is devised so as to deceive Philoctetes by integrating into its texture two conventions of the Greek theatre: the alleged 'low voice' when a character is speaking aside, and the exclusion of a speaking person from the dialogue while the other two speakers are conversing. First, lines 573–4 and 576–7 are spoken aside because Philoctetes should not hear what the sailor says to Neoptolemus.<sup>19</sup> However, we have to accept that the audience can still hear despite the stress on the 'low voice'.<sup>20</sup> Then, the Merchant tries to avoid Philoctetes' involvement in the dialogue while he continues conversing with Neoptolemus.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In lines 587–8 Neoptolemus repeats the order he gave to the Merchant in 580–1 to reveal openly what he knows. Could Neoptolemus' words at 580–1 and, insistently, at 587–8 imply that he orders the Merchant to stop pretending and abandon secrecy for the sake of complete words? In this sense Neoptolemus complies with Odysseus' instruction in the prologue (131), that when the Merchant speaks in a deceitful way, Neoptolemus has to pick up whatever hints are most useful in what he says. Accordingly cf. Montiglio (above n. 13) 281–2 who notices the paradox in the Athenian democracy where deception and strategic secrecy were legitimate at times of war while open and sincere speech defined the behavior of the Athenian citizens in their political deliberation in the assembly. On the other side, Neoptolemus seems to strive with his Achillean nature which rejects *ψευδῆ λέγειν* (108), when he replies to the Merchant's *ὄρα τὶ ποιεῖς, παῖ*, with the words *σκοπῶ καὶ γὰρ πάλαι* (589). Cf. P. E. Easterling *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1997, 170 who says that "the audience may take [Neoptolemus' reply] as a hint that [he] has been feeling qualms about the propriety of deceiving the trusting Philoctetes."

<sup>19</sup> Taplin (above n. 6) 131 n. 1: "As to who hears, it must be assumed that everyone on stage hears, unless there is some clear indication to the contrary."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bain (above n. 16) 83: "It is only by convention that a third actor can be excluded from a conversation which the audience hears."

<sup>21</sup> This arrangement of dialogue in which Philoctetes is confined into a silent position for the most part of the conversation between the two men seems to provide an instance of "uneven contact between three persons on stage". See Mastrorarde (above n. 15) 83 n. 35.

## The prophecy of Helenus

The secrecy in the preceding dialogues prepares the atmosphere for the display of the prophecy of Helenus. It is the first time that the prophecy is spoken out by the Merchant and heard by Neoptolemus, Philoctetes and the audience. Helenus has foretold that Troy will be captured with Philoctetes' assistance. Moreover, the Merchant confirms that Odysseus was bidden in public to perform the mission to bring Philoctetes to Troy. In a sense Neoptolemus hears for the first time what the False-Merchant has to say in this prophecy, because in the prologue Odysseus warned him that he has to use the sailor's words in the best way for the deceit (130–1). But the audience might still be wondering whether, in this part of the dialogue, the prophecy is a deceptive invention or a real fact.

The prophecy is a new element which takes further the statements of Odysseus in the prologue. There Odysseus claimed that Philoctetes must be brought to Troy by means of guile (101). Persuasion would be a feeble weapon to bend Philoctetes' stubbornness, and violence is impossible. In the Merchant's report (603–21), the audience hear a new story for the first time, that it is predicted by divine authority that Troy will be taken with the help of Philoctetes. The prophecy alters the knowledge of the audience with regard to Odysseus' previous statements, to the extent that it brings forward the element of persuasion, and not of deceit, as a means of luring Philoctetes to Troy.<sup>22</sup>

Critics are in dispute when they have to answer whether the report of the prophecy is true or false, a part of Odysseus' stratagem of deception.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the prophecy can be seen as a part of the progressive revelation of the truth that Philoctetes must learn gradually in order to be aware that Odysseus is on his track.<sup>24</sup> So the requirements of the prophecy are expanded

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Odysseus' οὐ μὴ πίθηται (103) with the False-Merchant's πείσαντες λόγῳ (612). See also lines 617–8 by the Merchant, which allow for persuasion or some other means, by contrast with 623–4, where Philoctetes shows that he understands that Odysseus intends to persuade him. Cf. I. Linforth, "Philoctetes: The Play and the Man", *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15.3 (1956) 95–156, esp. 115 and A. F. Garvie, "Deceit, Violence and Persuasion in the *Philoctetes*", in *Studi Classici in Onore di Quintino Cataudella* I, Catania 1972, 213–226.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. D. B. Robinson, "Topics in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*", *CQ* 19 (1969) 34–56, esp. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Budelmann (above n. 9) 118 notices that in the report of the prophecy "Diomedes has disappeared altogether" and he continues that "the force of prophecy may be felt [...] also in the elimination of a certain piece of fiction that the False-Merchant had introduced only a few lines earlier."

throughout the play, supplying different aspects of ambiguous statements up to the point of explicit indication of its terms, as confirmed by Heracles at the end.<sup>25</sup> The audience follow this process, firstly in the Merchant's tale, where they are expected to see his report as a false one, but to be uncertain to what extent this is another trick on the part of Odysseus or a true revelation among the falsehood.<sup>26</sup>

The Merchant's speech being over, Philoctetes bursts out in indignation and declares himself determined to disregard any endeavour by his enemy to persuade him (622–5). In his self-pity Philoctetes seeks from the Merchant further confirmation of Odysseus' intentions. Finally, he repeats his firm commitment to resisting the Greeks. As in the first instance Neoptolemus avoided the entanglement of Philoctetes in the conversation with the Merchant, so at the end of this encounter the Merchant shuns further words with Philoctetes, pretending ignorance of any relevant detail (οὐκ οἶδά πω τί φησι 580 // οὐκ οἶδ' ἐγὼ ταῦτ' 626). Then he returns to his ship, leaving Philoctetes brooding in his discontent. With his departure the Merchant has no other dramatic function in the play, although we are not in a position to know whether his part is over after he has executed the plan of deception.<sup>27</sup>

### **The function of hearing in the False-Merchant scene**

The False-Merchant has to be considered as the person who performs Odysseus' treacherous plan. He makes his entrance with the ostensible purpose of warning Neoptolemus about the doings of the Greeks. However, his real aim is to delude Philoctetes and to make him eager to leave Lemnos the moment he hears the news of Odysseus' pursuit. The text emphasizes the function of hearing, which

<sup>25</sup> A. E. Hinds, "The Prophecy of Helenus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*", *CQ* 17 (1967) 169–80, esp. 170.

<sup>26</sup> On the element of 'surprise' see D. Seale, "The Element of Surprise in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*", *BICS* 19 (1972) 94–102 and P. E. Easterling, "Philoctetes and Modern Criticism", in: E. Segal (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 1983, 217–28, esp. 219.

<sup>27</sup> The device of the False-Merchant seems to be a version of a form exploited by Sophocles in *Electra*. There the Paedagogus takes over the role of a false Messenger who reports the death of Orestes in a horse-race in Phocis. His aim is to deceive Clytaemnestra and Electra, so preparing the way for the arrival of Orestes, unsuspected by his enemies, and the recognition by Electra. In *Electra*, the Paedagogus reappears to precipitate the action when Orestes and Electra delay the recognition scene (1326).

passes knowledge seemingly acquired by the ears of the Merchant to the ears of Neoptolemus, but which really aims at impressing the hearing of Philoctetes.<sup>28</sup> Philoctetes is isolated from the verbal interaction between the Merchant and Neoptolemus because he must hear (though not fully understand) what the other speakers devised for him.<sup>29</sup>

In the imaginative space of the offstage events we can go on hearing another chain of words leading back to the happenings at Troy: All the Greeks have heard Odysseus' proposition to pursue Philoctetes (595) and they have consented to his enterprise when he promised to fetch Philoctetes to Troy whether he wanted it or not (ἐκούσιον 617 // ἄκοντα 618). Before that, all heard the prophecy of Helenus and it was after this hearing that Odysseus committed himself to bringing Philoctetes to Troy.<sup>30</sup> The False-Merchant is supposed to transfer this information from ear to ear, by reaching the last hearer (620) of a knowledge which has traveled from the camp of Troy to the desert island of Lemnos.<sup>31</sup> True and untrue facts seem to be linked now in a framework of openly heard sayings.

While the Merchant tells his crafty story and Neoptolemus feeds him appropriate questions (cf. 130–1//542ff.) we tend to think that there is Odysseus lurking behind the words of the False-Merchant. The two characters, Odysseus

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<sup>28</sup> Note the repercussion in the repetitions of the words ἤκουσα 549, ἀκούσας 564, ἀκήκοας 588, κλύεις 591. Cf. S. Østerud, "The Intermezzo with the False-Merchant in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 542–627", *C&M* 9 (1973) 10–26, esp. 26, who takes the story of Helenus "to be meant for Neoptolemus rather than for Philoctetes". However, S. L. Schein "Divine and Human in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*", in V. Pedrick – S. M. Oberhelman (eds.) *The Soul of Tragedy. Essays on Athenian Drama*, Chicago 2005, 27–47, esp. 32 and 35 suggests that in the prologue and the Merchant scene "Neoptolemus may be concealing his knowledge of the prophecy"; In fact, we are never told how much Neoptolemus knows; he could well be making inferences as he goes along, rather than concealing information. Cf. lines 199–200//1340–1.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Philoctetes' repeated calls to the strangers with the Greek clothes to speak so he can hear their voice: φωνῆς δ' ἀκοῦσαι βούλομαι (225) // φωνήσατ' εἴπερ ὡς φίλοι προσήκετε (229), and the outburst of joy at hearing Greek speech: ὦ φίλτατον φώνημα (234). See Montiglio (above n. 13) 224, who thinks that "[Philoctetes'] thirst for contact is translated into a thirst for words, spoken and heard."

<sup>30</sup> It is remarkable that Odysseus is referred to as the man ὁ πάντ' ἀκούων ἀισχρὰ καὶ λωβήτ' ἔπη (607); cf. A. J. Podlecki, "The Power of the Word in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*" *GRBS* 7 (1966) 233–250, esp. 238.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. also B. Goward, *Telling Tragedy. Narrative in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides*, London. 1999, 101 who says that "the multiplicity of deceitful journeys creates a kind of narrative *mise en abîme* in which the world seems full of dupers and the duped".

and the Merchant, are played by the third actor,<sup>32</sup> and their appearances in the different stages of the play mark the change of action from deceit to violence as the means for hustling Philoctetes to the ship for Troy.<sup>33</sup>

In the avalanche of exchanges the Merchant defines persuasion as the means that the prophecy specifies over any other alternative for bringing Philoctetes to Troy. Moreover, later in the play, Neoptolemus will try to use persuasion when his tormented conscience will not allow him to continue using deceit in order to achieve his aim. But even when he discloses the truth to Philoctetes, he will not succeed in convincing him of the need for his presence in Troy (cf. 915ff.).<sup>34</sup> At 974, Odysseus' abrupt intervention in the play, when both deceit and the persuasion are proven to have failed, signals that he will attempt to use violence against Philoctetes to force him into the ship.<sup>35</sup> Yet violence too fails, when it is attempted once again in the mirror-scene of Odysseus' second sudden appearance at 1293. Hence, the False-Merchant's scene in Philoctetes is dramatically important because it comes at a half-way point in the journey between deceit and violence, by highlighting the divine order that advocates the means of persuasion. It is an irony of the drama that, in this ambivalent context of facts filled with half-truths and purposeful lies, Philoctetes is unwilling to surrender and to obey the oracle under the present circumstances.

The play ends with two contrasting scenes that are mutually subverted: Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are heading for their return to Greece (1402–8). Heracles intervenes in his epiphany, and their decision is also altered by Philoctetes' change of mind when he yields to Heracles' admonition to come to Troy (1409–71). Philoctetes will be finally persuaded after he listens to what

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Z. Pavlovskis, "The Voice of the Actor in Greek Tragedy", *CW* 71 (1977) 113–23, esp. 119 who argues "that the merchant's accents should remind us of Odysseus is strikingly appropriate, since both are deceivers, and since the merchant is a tool of Odysseus." See also M. W. Blundell, "The Moral Character of Odysseus in *Philoctetes*", *GRBS* 28 (1987) 307–29, esp. 324: "The 'merchant' is a reflection of his creator and as such reflects poorly on him."

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Odysseus' return at 974 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Taplin (above n. 3) 71: "Once he [Neoptolemus] comes to the point when he cannot continue the deceit, his words and his deeds both dry up together."

<sup>35</sup> Blundell (above n. 32) 327 says: "Odysseus, [...], rules out the idea of honest persuasion (103) and uses his tongue initially for insidious persuasion in the cause of deceit. Once his stratagem has been uncovered he makes no further attempt to persuade, but turns to threats of *βία*, and even to its use."

Heracles has to say about the gods' prediction for him.<sup>36</sup> These two scenes, closely linked together at the end of the play, sustain the impression of ambiguity and irony in relation to what has happened in Lemnos and also for the events that are expected to follow over at Troy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. lines 1410, 1412, 1427 by Heracles and line 1445 by Philoctetes.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Easterling (above n. 26) 227–8 and also Schein (above n. 28) 43–5 for Heracles' intervention and the ambiguities of the play's ending.